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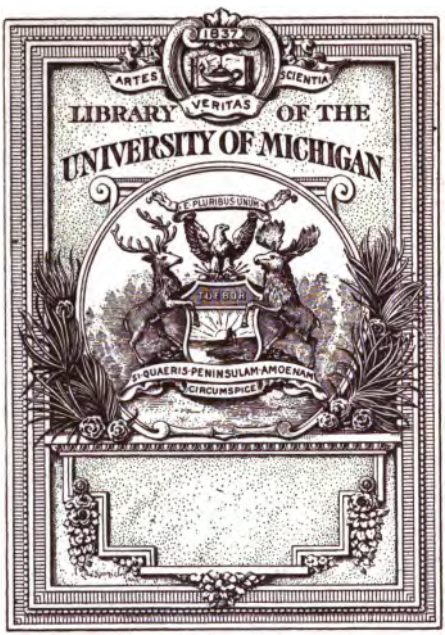
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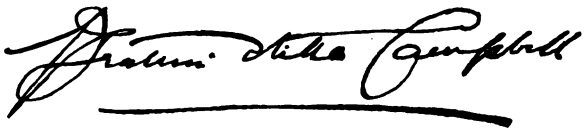
# WARP AND WOOF

MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL AS "THEODOSIA HEMING."



# WARP AND WOOF

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

BY

Edith Lyttelton

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
ADELPHI TERRACE
1908

## Dramatis Personæ

| | |
|---|---|
| MADAME STÉFANIE . . | *Fashionable dressmaker a genius with an aggressive personality.* |
| THEODOSIA HEMING . | *Fitter at Madame Stéfanie's, very good looking, full of life and vigour.* |
| PHŒBE HEMING . . | *Sister to Theodosia, pale and pretty.* |
| LADY JENNY BARKSTONE | *Fashionable smart woman, not quite young, but struggling to be so.* |
| MISS GRACE PONSONBY | *Tall, fair, well-bred girl.* |
| POPPY PRICE . . . . | *Vivacious young pushing wife of a rich stockbroker—liked for her vitality and quickness.* |
| MISS DONALDSON . . | *H.M. Inspector of Factories.* |
| MISS SPENCER . . . | *Show-woman at Stéfanie's.* |
| MISS BURNS . . . . | *Head fitter at Stéfanie's.* |
| ALICE BATES . . . . | *Work girls at Stéfanie's.* |
| LIZZIE GREEN . . . | |
| JESSIE BYLES . . . | |



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| | |
|---|---|
| MR. PERCY WILSON . | *A small, effeminate tame cat man, a hanger-on of fashionable women. Terribly expert in small details.* |
| LORD LICKWOOD . . | *Eldest son of a Duke, tall, strong, stupid.* |
| MR. GERALD PRICE . | *Poppy's husband, very rich, subservient to his wife and indifferent about things in general as long as Poppy is nice to him.* |
| TOM BENT . . . . | *Liftman, a good, determined fellow.* |
| MANSON . . . . . | *Showman at Stéfanie's.* |

FOOTMEN, MAID, WORK GIRLS, ESSAYEUSE.

# WARP AND WOOF

## ACT I

*Time, 9 a.m. Scene: The showroom at Madame Stéfanie's. Right back is an archway, draped with curtains, leading to the workrooms. Left back are glass doors opening on to a landing with a lift. In the right wing are three glass doors leading to dressing-rooms. In the left wing is a big window. Large mirrors hang on the walls. Tables, sofa, chairs, writing-desk close to the archway, furs, lingerie, hats on stands, fashion plates on the table, &c., &c. Thick carpet on the floor. Muslin blinds on all the windows and glass doors. The curtains are still drawn, so it is rather dark, though the morning sun streams through on to the floor, showing up the sleeping figures of four girls.*

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### SCENE I

JESSIE BYLES, TOM BENT, MISS BURNS, THEO HEMING, PHŒBE HEMING.

Phœbe Heming is on the sofa. Miss Burns on two arm-chairs with a cane chair in the middle. Jessie Byles on the floor with a silk pillow under her head. Theo is hardly visible lying on the floor near the archway, her back to the audience. All four are sleeping profoundly—Phœbe quite still, Jessie restless. After a moment Tom Bent enters from the door, humming. He goes to the window, opens the curtains, and pulls up the blinds, letting in a flood of sunlight, and then for the first time sees the girls and gives a prolonged whistle. He puts a lot of letters on the table. He calls the girls by their names. "Jessie," "Phœbe," "Theo"; then looks at Phœbe, very tenderly, shaking his head and his fist. He takes out his watch, seems to decide that he must wake them and throws the window up. Jessie wakes with a start.

JESSIE

Is that you, Tom? My—where am I?

She rubs her eyes.

TOM, chaffing her.

What do you mean by lying in bed like this —do you know it's nine o'clock? I suppose you was at a reception last night, or a ball most like.

JESSIE, shaking herself and laughing.

That's right—I was sitting up for a ball if I wasn't dancing . . . we've been at them blooming fancy gowns all night.

TOM, looking round,

I never seed this happen before.

JESSIE

You haven't been here in the season before—that's why.

TOM

By Gum! it's too bad—what time did you stop?

JESSIE

I dunno—about five, I suppose—I know it was light, and Phœbe there dropped sound off—and then Theo she went and told madame we were

all gluey with sleep—and we was told to lie down where we could. The others are upstairs flopping round. In course Theo said Phœbe must 'ave the couch—and quite right too. Miss Burns wakes up. Good mornin', Miss Burns.

MISS BURNS, who wakes with a start and seems frightened at once.

Good gracious me . . . what's the time? Is madame come yet? She gets up vigorously and shakes herself. Nine, is it? Why she'll be here in a minute. Looks round the room. Now then, Jessie, you wake Phœbe and Theo, and come along yourself—we must have a wash up—and some tea, and set to work. Oh, gracious! She bustles out of the room. At the door. Make haste, Miss Spencer's due any minute.

JESSIE

Oh, I ain't afraid of 'er—it's only madame that matters—but 'ere goes—Miss 'Eming—Miss 'Eming.

Theo in the background sits up suddenly quite awake and alert.

THEO.

Where's Phœbe? Don't make such a noise, you'll wake her.

JESSIE, after a slight pause.

Miss Phœbe's asleep still, Miss 'Eming, small blame to 'er, on that lovely couch. She moves away.

## SCENE II

THEO, TOM and PHŒBE.

Theo comes into the room; she goes up to the sofa and looks at Phœbe who stirs uneasily.

THEO

How can I wake her Tom, she's simply dead tired?

JESSIE, at the door.

You'd better, or you'll 'ave madame on your track. She goes out laughing.

Theo smoothes her skirts and her hair while she is talking and Tom goes on tidying up the room,

THEO

Phœbe's not fit for work. I've spent all our savings on medicines and the doctor, and I still owe him ever so much money—you don't know how ill she is.

TOM

Yes, I do, my girl—I'm not engaged to her for nothing.

THEO, laughing.

Engaged! Oh, Tom—and you know I don't allow it.

TOM

I know—but look here, Theo—I can't stand all this much longer—let me marry her, and I'll take you both to Canada.

THEO, seriously.

You've no right to ask Phœbe to face a hard struggle with you.

TOM, fiercely.

No, I haven't, you've got me there. He pauses. If I go to Canada and make a home will you bring Phœbe to me?

THEO, laughing again.

That depends——

TOM, seizing her wrist

Don't laugh—I'm in dead earnest.

Theo laughs again.

THEO

I can see that.

TOM

I'm not going without a promise from you as well as her. Don't I know who's master with you two? He stops quivering.

THEO

If you make a home—if you still like Phœbe —if Phœbe still likes you—if we've got any money for the journey—four ifs—then I'll promise to bring her.

TOM, looking at her earnestly.

Do you mean it?

THEO

If! if! if! if!

TOM, brutally.

I'm afraid of you. You talk too much to that gentleman who writes for the papers.

THEO, looking up sharply.

Mr. Wilson? He's the best friend we've got. Why he made Stéfanie take me and Phœbe too.

TOM

You take care, Theo—take care.

THEO, very angry.

I don't need you to tell me to take care, Tom Bent. You mind your own business, and leave me to manage mine—and Phœbe's. She turns away angrily, just as Madame Stéfanie and Miss Spencer enter, both in hats and capes.

TOM, in a low tone to Theo.

I'm sorry, Theo—I didn't mean it—I'm sorry.

## Scene III

THE SAME, MADAME STÉFANIE, MISS SPENCER, MANSON.

Miss Spencer begins to work at once, setting out the things in the showroom while she listens.

MADAME STÉFANIE

See if that galong's arrived from Paris for Mrs. Price—you know, and get—— Looks round. Good Lord! aren't you girls at work yet?

What d'yer mean by it? I was up with you last night, and yet 'ere I am again—that's the way you treat me when I let you come down here to sleep. Who's this? She goes up to the sofa and touches Phœbe. Get up! Get up! . . . it's late . . . Phœbe sits up blinking. Now go and wash your face and hands in the bath-room—the tea's been ready an hour.

PHŒBE

I'm sorry, madame.

MADAME STÉFANIE picks up her letters, talking all the time.

Go on, both of you—don't waste time now.

Theo and Phœbe go out by archway.

Miss Spencer, you see to those dresses being sent at once—a jolly good thing we did sit up last night and got that lot cleared. Now we're free for them fancy costumes for the ball. She has torn up several letters and thrown them down on the table. Where's Manson? Why isn't he here? He wasn't up all night!

She rings the bell violently, opens the lift door, and calls out.

Is Manson there? Send him up at once if he is—that silly Mrs. Price will be round directly about her gown. She says she must have it for to-night—and I know, as well as I stand here, it's all bunkum, and that she ain't got an invite.

Enter Bent with a telegram on a tray.

Good Lord! What's this, I wonder. Opens and reads aloud, "Lady Jenny Barkstone just arrived

from Egypt, wants to go to fancy ball to-night, am bringing her directly to order gown—please manage somehow—important. Percy Wilson." Percy Wilson! No, I won't do it, there's the long and the short of it. Lady Jenny Barkstone, who's she? . . . oh, yes, that smart woman who lost her pearls in a motor—you remember, an awful scandal—but I can't do it—not for twenty Percy Wilsons. She begins to go out and meets Manson. Hullo!—here you are at last—this won't do, Manson, you know, you're half an hour late.

MANSON

But I've been to the city, madame, about them seaweeds.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Oh, yes, of course—all right, Manson, but for heaven's sake get the show-room ready. A bell rings. The lift! Good Lord, it'll be Mrs. Price.

She goes out quickly by the archway. Manson hurriedly puts out some feather boas and cloaks and parasols. The doors are opened by Tom Bent and disclose Poppy Price just stepping out of the lift. Tom carries an enormous cardboard box, evidently full of flowers.

## Scene IV

THE SAME. MRS. PRICE, GERALD PRICE, POPPY, looking round.

Good-morning. . . . I'm splendidly early, ain't I? To Tom. Put the flowers down, please.

Tom puts them on the table.

Hasn't my husband turned up yet?

MISS SPENCER

We've not seen him, madame.

POPPY

How tiresome. He promised to bring my letters to meet me. I've just come up from the country. Lift bell rings. Ah, here he is perhaps.

She waits till the lift door opens, and Gerald Price enters, carrying a lot of letters. She runs straight up to him.

POPPY

What news?—has it come?

GERALD, in a drawling tone.

I didn't dare open your letters.

POPPY, hurriedly looking through her letters.

No—no—no—it is too bad—but I won't despair. Now you go straight off and try on your coat. I think it will be most chic your going simply as a hunting man— specially as you're not one.

GERALD

What's the good if we haven't got the invitation?

POPPY

I'm not going to be beaten, I tell you . . .

we're going to get to that ball somehow—now go off . . . do.

GERALD

Mayn't I stop and see your frock?

POPPY

Certainly not—it isn't finished. . . . Oh, get along, Gerald, I'll be home to luncheon. She pushes him gently towards the lift. . . . He goes out. . . . She turns to Miss Spencer.

What's the good of coming early if I don't have my fitting—my gown will be ready for to-night, won't it?

MISS SPENCER

Must you positively have it to to-night, madame?

POPPY, staring horrified.

Of course. Now look here, Miss Spencer, I'm not going to be put off like this. I ordered my gown weeks and weeks ago, and I always told you it was for the duchess's ball.

MISS SPENCER, insidiously.

Madame is in a terrible rush, and I thought, perhaps, if you had changed your mind, and were not going, you could let us have a day or two longer.

POPPY

Changed my mind. I don't know what you mean. Of course I'm going. She turns away evidently angry, then she catches sight of Percy Wilson standing in the doorway.

## SCENE V

THE SAME. PERCY.

POPPY

Percy, what *are* you doing here, and so early too? She runs up to him, and drags him down stage, pretending to be breathless.

PERCY

Oh, do be careful! I've only just had my breakfast. I've come to see about a friend's gown. Manson takes the opportunity of finishing the arrangement of the show-room. Miss Spencer goes out.

POPPY

Percy, you've always called yourself a friend of mine, haven't you?

PERCY

Of course. Why, I'm almost your godfather.

POPPY

Well, I want help from a friend now, desperately.

PERCY, putting up his eyeglass.

Good heavens! does Gerald . . .

POPPY, dramatically.

Gerald—no. But listen. The duchess has never sent me an invitation to the ball to-night. I've ordered my dress, and told everyone I'm

going. What am I to do? Isn't it awful? Oh, Percy, can't you help me?

PERCY, musing.

The duchess disapproves of you, you know.

POPPY, dismayed.

Disapproves! Why . . . what does she mean?

PERCY

Well, her precious boy Lickwood is always hanging about on your doorstep, and though she'd move heaven and earth to get him away from Lady Jenny Barkstone, she doesn't want him out of the frying-pan into the fire. He laughs disagreeably.

POPPY, clapping her hands.

Oh, this is too good for anything. Lickwood isn't after me. It's that delightful girl—Grace Ponsonby. He's always meeting her at our house, and as I know she's desperately in love with him, I'm just helping to lead him along. Luckily Lady Jenny is away, so I'm having a free hand.

PERCY

Lady Jenny arrived in London last night.

POPPY

What a blow! Never mind Percy, I'll fight Jenny in the open. Can't you go and tell the

duchess all about it? If only she'll ask me to the ball I'll undertake to get Licky out of Jenny's clutches and engaged to Grace. They wouldn't mind Grace, would they?

PERCY

I should think they'd be thankful for any nice girl now. It's extraordinary how a married woman complication humbles parents. But this is splendid news! The very moment I've done my business here I'll go and tell the duchess all you say. She's very stiff, but I think I might soften her.

POPPY

Oh, Percy, you are the best friend in the world.

Enter Grace Ponsonby from the lift.

Why, here's Grace—doesn't she look pretty?

## Scene VI

THE SAME. GRACE PONSONBY.

PERCY, putting up his eyeglass.

I don't admire that English type much myself. I prefer little women.

POPPY

You humbug! She runs up to Grace and kisses her. How are you darling? Grace bows to Percy, smiles, and then shakes hands.

Enter Miss Spencer.

MISS SPENCER, to Poppy.

Will you come, please, madame, the fitter will be down directly.

POPPY

Oh, I mustn't waste a minute. She kisses her hand to Grace and hurries off into dressing-room No. 2, waving Miss Spencer aside.

MISS SPENCER, to Grace.

Miss Burns is ready for you, mademezell.

GRACE

Miss Burns! Oh, I won't have her. I want Miss Theo. She always makes for me.

MISS SPENCER

She's very busy, mademezell.

GRACE

I only come here for her. I must have her.

MISS SPENCER

Very well, mademezell, I'll send for her.

She ushers Grace into dressing-room No. 1.

## Scene VII

PERCY, MISS SPENCER, THEO, MANSON.

PERCY

Miss—er—miss—er—will you kindly take my card to Madame Stéfanie—Mr. Wilson—I particularly want to see her.

MISS SPENCER

Madame is engaged at present, sir.

PERCY

Oh, she'll see me all right. I'm a favourite of hers. He laughs. Miss Spencer looks at the card.

MISS SPENCER

Will you come this way, sir?

Manson has gone to the archway and calls out.

MANSON

Miss Theo, Miss Theo, come on—you're wanted.

Percy Wilson hesitates, when he hears Theo's name and waits a moment. Manson and Miss Spencer look at one another significantly. Theo calls out from the back.

THEO

All right, I'm coming. Calling back. Send that trimmimg down for me. She appears in the archway carrying Grace Ponsonby's gown.

MISS SPENCER, firmly to Percy.

Madame is this way, sir.

Percy hesitates again, but finally follows Miss Spencer through the entrance just as Theo enters, carrying Miss Ponsonby's gown.

## Scene VIII

THEO, MANSON, MISS SPENCER.

THEO

Good-morning, Mr. Manson! She nods easily to him, but he insists upon shaking hands.

MANSON

You don't look very well, Miss Theo—what's the matter?

THEO

Matter! You'd look pale if you'd been up all night. Rubbing her cheeks. There, is that better?

MANSON, pulling something out of his pocket.

Oh, I can improve on that, Miss Theo. I always carry a little outfit with me. I find it makes me very popular with the ladies. Come here. Theo goes to Manson. He dabs a little rouge on her cheeks.

THEO, laughing, looks at the glass.

Well, I declare, it does improve one. I really look quite pretty.

Enter Miss Spencer from lift door.

Just look at me, Miss Spencer, dear. I'm a regular beauty now—is that a new hat? Pointing to one on the stand.

MISS SPENCER, taking it off the stand.

Just arrived from Paris—isn't it lovely?

THEO, handing the dress she carries to Manson.

Do let me put it on a minute. She tries it on before a glass. Isn't it funny the way a hat makes you into a different person? It doesn't matter how shabby your frock is if you've got a good hat—that does suit me, doesn't it? Now I'm

not Theo Heming any more, but Lady Theodosia—hem—Howard.

Enter Alice Bates.

## SCENE IX

THE SAME. ALICE BATES.

THEO

Hullo, Alice, is that my trimming?

ALICE

Yes, Miss Heming. She hands her the trimming.

THEO, to Manson as she moves away.

This is Alice's last day here; she's going on the stage.

MANSON, faintly interested.

You don't say——Theo stands close to the dressing-room door listening.

ALICE

Yes, thank goodness, no more scuffling for me. I'm tired of all this. There's lots of girls won't stand it, I can tell you; but it don't matter to me—this day week I sail from Southampton.

MANSON

By Jove, where are you going to?

ALICE

South Africa, with my theatrical company, of course. That's the place. Perhaps I shall marry a millionaire, and then I'll come back and order my clothes here, and give you a good turn.

THEO, laughing.

Just listen to her!

Goes out to dressing-room.

## SCENE X

MADAME STÉFANIE AND PERCY.

Enter Madame Stéfanie with Percy Wilson. She starts with anger as she sees Theo and the rest have been talking. Alice Bates hurries through the archway.

MADAME STÉFANIE

What are you all about? Get to your work at once. It beats me it does 'ow you can all stand about doing nothing. Turning to Percy. No, Mr. Wilson, I really can't do it. I've 'ad the inspectors down on me once this week already.

PERCY

My dear soul, you must—it's a chance for you. Lady Jenny is one of the smartest and best dressed women in London. If you do this for her she'll rave about you, and it'll mean hundreds of orders—come, you know you can.

MADAME STÉFANIE

To night . . . to-night . . . it is too much.

PERCY

Nonsense, pull yourself together—we'll combine something. You can almost pin it on her, you know. Bell rings. Good heavens, here she is, I expect.

## SCENE XI

THE SAME. MISS BURNS.

The door opens. Lady Jenny is seen getting out of the lift. At the same moment Miss Burns comes out of dressing-room No. 2.

MISS BURNS

Can you come a moment, madame?

MADAME STÉFANIE

Yes, yes, I'm coming. Mr. Wilson, I cannot do it, you must tell her—you must take her away.

PERCY

Oh, no, I shan't. I'm too much your friend for that!

Madame Stéfanie shrugs her shoulders and hurries away.

## SCENE XII

PERCY, LADY JENNY, MISS SPENCER, AND MANSON IN THE BACKGROUND.

Enter Lady Jenny.

LADY JENNY

Thank heaven you're here, Pussy. She shakes

hands. It's too sweet of you. I simply fainted with terror in the lift. I couldn't have faced Stéfanie alone. Miss Spencer comes forward, then seeing Lady Jenny is with Wilson, goes out through the archway. Manson busies himself with furs.

PERCY

I'll do my best, but it's very difficult. Why on earth don't you order your frocks sooner? You women are so badly organised.

LADY JENNY

You see I never thought I should be back in time; but now I am, I simply must go. I went to my own woman and she can't do it, and I've been to Worth and he can't. I only wired to you when I was at my last gasp.

PERCY

Well, well, we'll manage it all somehow. Madame Stéfanie's a real good chap. He—he—he—I'll arrange, too, that you are fitted by Theo.

LADY JENNY

Theo! Who's she?

PERCY

One of Stéfanie's hands—a little genius, I assure you.

LADY JENNY

How do you know about her?

PERCY

She's a *protégée* of mine. I came across her once when I was reciting for Lady Hope's girls' club. Just fancy, she was working in an awful second-hand bucket shop in Lambeth. I got Stéfanie to give her a trial, and she's gone to the top in a few months.

LADY JENNY, dryly.

It was good of you to take so much interest in her. I suppose she's very pretty.

PERCY, enthusiastically.

Pretty, my dear! Properly dressed she'd be a beauty.

LADY JENNY, laughing.

And is she still a *protégée* of yours. Oh, Pussy—Pussy!

PERCY, delighted.

You suspicious old thing! You really shouldn't impute evil motives like this. I'm very fond of work girls, and do all I can to help them, poor dears.

LADY JENNY

Well, I shall certainly have Theo—is that her name?—to fit me. I like to keep an eye on you, Pussy.

PERCY

Stéfanie must plan it all first though. She's a marvel at correcting any little mistakes the Almighty has made in a figure.

LADY JENNY

Well, I'd better break it to her about my hips then. They're the great sorrow of my life.

PERCY

Why, in Paris they pad the hips.

LADY JENNY, impatient.

Oh, that's only to round them off.

PERCY

Well, I like big hips myself. They remind me of Spanish women—there's a sort of Eastern mystery about them. Besides, they're classical—look at the Venus of Milo.

LADY JENNY, pretending to scream.

There, everyone says that; but I'm not as bad as she is anyhow—only I have to be carefully dressed. Madame Stéfanie's a French woman, of course.

PERCY, in a mocking tone.

Oh, of course! I'll tell you a secret, Lady Jenny, if you won't repeat it. She's no more

French than I am—she comes from Stepney. But she's clever enough to know that would never do, so she frenchifies her awful accent and it passes. He . . . he . . . he . . .

Lady Jenny has become a little absent and restless, looking at things here and there. Then she comes up to Percy and sits beside him.

Manson, after hanging about a little, goes out.

LADY JENNY

Pussy, you've always been a good friend to me. Tell me the truth now. What's Lickwood been up to while I've been away?

PERCY, embarrassed and annoyed.

Now look here, Lady Jenny, I'm going to ask you something. I do wish you wouldn't call me Pussy, it is so—so disrespectful.

LADY JENNY

Oh, I couldn't call you anything but Pussy, I really couldn't. Why, it's my own little name for you. You know quite well that I must have a nickname. I could no more call you Percy than I could call Jimmy Lickwood Jimmy instead of Licky.

PERCY

Well, I don't like it!

LADY JENNY

Why, you're quite cross. I shall call you Pecksey now.

PERCY, quickly.

All right. I don't mind Pecksey.

LADY JENNY

That's settled then. Now, Pecksey, answer my question. What's Lickwood's new game? What's he up to?

PERCY, looks embarrassed.

What do you mean?

LADY JENNY

Oh, don't pretend, Picksey, Pecksey. What do you suppose I've hurried back from Egypt for like this? Rattle, rattle in the train, no bed, shouts and bumps all night, tepid coffee, and an old orange on the platform, Bernard in a rage at having to come round in the yacht alone. I'd heard rumours, but it was a letter from Poppy Price which finished me—you know how sharp she is, and how vulgar. She just put a p.s. to her letter, and it was this, "Lord Lickwood has been here most of the afternoon —what a boring young ass he is."

PERCY, in a tone of assurance.

You needn't worry about Poppy, my dear.

LADY JENNY

Why? Do you know something? Tell me quick. Oh, what a relief it would be if she had taken up with someone else.

PERCY, *significantly.*

She's made great friends with Grace Ponsonby.

LADY JENNY

Grace Ponsonby—that weird, long-legged girl without a mother. Why, someone told me she was desperately in love with Licky. *She rises in agitation.* Is that Poppy's game—is it? Tell me quick.

PERCY

It looks like it.

LADY JENNY

But she won't succeed. Licky must be bored to death with a dull, conventional girl—oh, Pussy, Pussy. What am I to do? *She turns away half crying.* I knew there was something going on. Why did I ever leave London? I won't let him go without a struggle. I can't lose him. He's everything to me. We've been friends for a long time—six months, quite.

PERCY

My dear soul, don't cry, please don't, you distress me beyond measure. Lickwood is not worth a thought from you. Why, you've never really cared for him—not really.

LADY JENNY, still crying a little.

Yes, I did, Pecksey, I did. Oh, I'll do Poppy a bad turn some day—it's so humiliating to lose him like this.

PERCY

Not a bit if you manage the situation well. You mustn't lose him . . . you must drop him. Ask Miss Ponsonby to dinner to-night. You'll soon see if he is caught by her, and then it will look as if *you* were helping the marriage —do you understand? And if he isn't—then no harm's done.

LADY JENNY, after a pause.

Yes! . . . that's a good idea. . . . Pecksey, you're a genius. . . . I sent Licky a telegram to come here and fetch me, and I'll be just the same to him, and . . .

## Scene XIII

THE SAME. MADAME STÉFANIE AND MANSON.

Enter Madame Stéfanie. She looks round, sees no one is there, calls out through the archway, and bustles forward. Manson appears and goes to his desk.

PERCY

Here you are at last! What a female Napoleon you are! Madame Stéfanie laughs and shakes her finger at him. Here's Lady Jenny Barkstone . . . you know what she wants!

MADAME STÉFANIE, in a strong French accent.

Not this ball! Oh, Milady, I really cannot do it!

LADY JENNY

This is ghastly!

PERCY

It's all right, Lady Jenny . . . she'll do it.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Really, madame, I do not think it is possible. I do my best, but really for to-night! Figure to yourself I have thirty-four dresses to send home, and for the ball I have made quite one hundred. What sort of dress does madame want?

LADY JENNY

Oh, I must have your advice for that—you see my figure isn't my best point. It's rather weird. I'm short-waisted, and a bit hippy.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Not at all. I do not see it. You——

LADY JENNY

Oh, you'd better know what you're in for. Here, Pecksey, take my cloak, there's a dear. Wilson takes the cloak and puts it over a chair. Madame Stéfanie examines Lady Jenny with care and surprise.

MADAME STÉFANIE

*Tiens, tiens, tiens*—it is true. I thought it was the corsets, but I see you are badly made.

Mr. Wilson, you know . . . I can make madame look quite different. Lengthen here—pad there—pull the waist down.

LADY JENNY

Oh, if you'll only do that for me to-night—it would be too perfect. You don't know how important it is for me to go to this ball properly dressed, isn't it, Pecksey?

PERCY nods his head.

Vital—vital. Look here, Madame Stéfanie, I'll save you all the trouble of thinking. I've got a little idea for her. Turning to Lady Jenny. I think you ought to be all glittering—a serpent—or a mermaid. Or—yes . . . Medusa. You know you can look so wicked, and I do love wicked eyes. Everyone does. I can see you with wriggling snakes in your hair, all shining, and your eyes darting. Can you visualise the idea, Madame Stéfanie?

MADAME STÉFANIE

Yes, I see, I 'ave just some embroidery from Paris. I will . . .

## Scene XIV

THE SAME. THEO.

Theo comes out of dressing-room No. 1 and speaks to Madame Stéfanie. She stands with the dressing-room door half open behind her.

THEO

Madame, will you come and look at Miss Ponsonby's gown—it is quite finished.

LADY JENNY

Miss Ponsonby—Grace Ponsonby. Oh, I must see her. Wait a minute, Pecksey, and I'll bring her out to you if she's presentable. She goes up to the dressing-room door. I simply must see her. She talks through the door. Grace, Grace, it's me, Jenny Barkstone, just back from Egypt. Do let me come in, duckie, and see you.

She goes in, leaving the door open, and Theo stands outside waiting.

MADAME STÉFANIE, to Percy.

Mr. Wilson, it's cruel this. I wanted to let the girls go 'ome to-night.

PERCY

You mustn't allow your heart to get the better of you in business.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Business! Business is killing me, that's what it is—killing me. Bell rings. But there, if I am to do it—— She hurries away and enters dressing-room, Theo following her.

The bell rings, the lift comes up, the door opens, and Lord Lickwood enters, embarrassed and shy. Manson comes forward, and Miss Spencer enters from the archway. Seeing it is a gentleman, and that Percy speaks to him, Manson goes back to the desk, and Miss Spencer goes out.

## Scene XV

PERCY, LORD LICKWOOD, GRACE, LADY JENNY.

LORD L.

Hullo! Wilson . . . . you here?

PERCY

Yes. I've just come to help Lady Jenny about her gown. You see, I've got rather an eye—I was born understanding chiffon. You've come to fetch her, I know, and I shan't join you. Oh, no, you wicked old things. What a nice coat that is! It's so much more difficult to dress a man than a woman. I always think you dress beautifully. Putting out his hand and touching Lord Lickwood's waistcoat. Nice brown woolly waistcoat. Do let me stroke it. Oh, how nice—like a caterpillar.

LORD L.

Ass! Looking round. Hang it all, this is a dressmaker's. I thought I was to come to her club. The door of dressing-room No. 1 opens. What's this? Hullo, Miss Ponsonby.

Grace Ponsonby is dragged out by Lady Jenny, looking very shy, dressed as a water nymph. Behind her is Theo.

LADY JENNY

Here she is! Oh, I had such a job to persuade her. Hullo, Licky, is that you? She comes forward eagerly and takes both Lord Lickwood's hands. How well you look! And don't I look well, too?

LORD L.

How do you do, Lady Jenny. He goes forward. How do you do, Miss Ponsonby. They shake hands.

GRACE

You're the last person in the world I should have expected to see here.

LADY JENNY

Oh, he's come to pick me up and feed me. I haven't seen him since I got back, so I had a dentist with him here.

GRACE

A what?

LADY JENNY

A dentist. Oh, don't you know? It's only a convenient word for an appointment, you dear innocent little thing.

GRACE

I see. Turns away.

LORD L.

It's rather unfair of Lady Jenny to plunge a wretched male into a dressmaker's shop. But what a lovely gown, Miss Ponsonby, is it . . .?

GRACE, vexed.

Lady Jenny made me come out. I'm only trying it on. It looks absurd in the daylight. . . . Good-bye, Lady Jenny, I must go and take it off.

LADY JENNY, following her out of earshot of Lord Lickwood.

Don't forget then—eight-thirty to-night. I'll take you across to the ball, and you can meet your official chaperon there. Will that do?

GRACE, unwillingly.

Yes—only I half promised Poppy.

LADY JENNY

Oh, I'm going to make Poppy and her husband come to dinner too, so that's all right—*au revoir* . . . ta-ta.

Grace goes back into the dressing-room.

PERCY

What a vision! A leetle too long in the leg perhaps; but it's a good fault. And that wavy, crimpv hair. I wonder if it's done with tongs or curlers?

LORD L.

You wonder a jolly sight too much!

LADY JENNY

Licky, you've come a bit soon. I'm not ready yet.

LORD L., turning to Lady Jenny.

What's this place? You told me it was a club.

LADY JENNY

No, I didn't. I said you were to pick me up here, and then we'd go and talk at my club, just round the corner. Goodness, how stiff and pokerish you look. What have I done? Sit down. I shan't be a minute. Just my measurements to take. You see I must go to the ball to-night. Good-bye, Pecksey, I shall never forget your goodness. Don't forget dinner to-night at an easy eight-thirty.

Miss Spencer comes forward from the archway.

MISS SPENCER

This way, madame.

LADY JENNY

All right.

She goes into dressing-room No. 3, Miss Spencer holding the door open for her.

## Scene XVI

PERCY, LORD LICKWOOD, ESSAYEUSE, MISS SPENCER, THEO.

LORD L.

I've never been in one of these women's shops before—it makes me shy.

PERCY

I often have to come and look round; for my journalistic work, you know. I wonder if anyone would mind if I smoked a cigarette. Takes out case. Have one?

LORD L.

No!

Enter an essayeuse in a very décolleté dress with a paste necklace and earrings. She walks up to the men and shows herself off, looking round vaguely. Manson, much distressed, rises in his chair, and beckons through the archway to Miss Spencer. Enter Miss Spencer from the back.

MISS SPENCER, angry.

Come back, Clarisse. You are for number four. What are you doing this way?

Both go out by archway.

PERCY

By Jove, she had a good figure that girl—but she couldn't save the dress. Did you ever see such a combination of colours in your life? I bet it wasn't one of Stéfanie's creations. She never goes wrong. This is the best establishment in London.

LORD L.

Do they have proper seats for the girls, I wonder? I read something about it in the papers the other day—makes them ill standing, or something—some fuss or other.

Miss Spencer enters with a hat box, which she asks Manson to address, and goes away.

PERCY

There's such a lot of sentimental nonsense talked, my dear fellow. He gets up. Theo comes out of the dressing-room with Miss Ponsonby's gown upon her arm.

Hullo, Theo . . . come here a moment. I want to congratulate you on that gown. I know you created it . . . it's a marvel, that shimmer and suggestion of water—very clever. Why shouldn't you have a little seaweed hanging from the shoulder? He leads her aside while talking.

Manson, having put the hat box by the door ready for Bent, goes out. Lickwood wanders round uneasily picking pins up off the floor. At last he finds a paper and goes and sits in the lift to read it.

## Scene XVII

THEO, PERCY.

THEO, pleased.

I'm so glad you like it, sir. I love working for Miss Ponsonby. She's never cross, and always asks after Phœbe—not that she's seen her, but she knows how I worry over her.

PERCY

I do think you're the kindest sister I've ever met. I wish I were your sister!

THEO, laughing.

Do you? You don't want anyone to look after you, I should think . . .

PERCY

Don't I though. But, my dear child, how are you getting on? I haven't seen you to talk to for ever so long. Is Stéfanie pleased with you? Are you learning?

THEO

Oh, Mr. Wilson, what am I to do? You've always been so good to me—do help me to decide.

PERCY, greatly pleased.

Of course I will—what's wrong with you now?

THEO

Oh, I'm getting on splendidly. Miss Spencer told me madame says I'm her best hand . . . but it's the overtime; I'm worn out—the work's awful. I daresay I could stand it, but there's Phœbe—the doctor told me yesterday she must not sit up at night—he frightened me. Her lips tremble. He said if I wanted to save her life I ought to send her abroad where it's warm. . . . What's the good of talking about that . . . but you know Phœbe's everything to me.

PERCY, after a slight pause.

You haven't learned all you can here, have you? You aren't ready to leave Stéfanie yet, I suppose?

THEO

Leave Stéfanie's . . . of course not . . . how could I . . . but I want to get Phœbe away somewhere.

PERCY

Perhaps I could help you there . . . we must

talk it all over. Half to himself. The time may have come to make a change. I'm not going to let you lose your youth and your lovely figure from overwork, though I must say I've never seen you look so pretty.

THEO

Pretty! Why, I thought I was a perfect fright. Oh, Manson's rouge. I forgot! She rubs her cheeks vigorously. You don't know how dead tired I am. You mustn't pay me any compliments. I'm not strong enough to-day to stand them. She makes a movement as if she were going.

PERCY, earnestly.

Wait a moment. I've got a lot of things to talk to you about. I take a great interest in you, as you know. . . .

THEO

You've been a good friend to us always. . . .

PERCY

Well, I should like to think that. Now you must let me help you—you must trust me. . . . I've got all sorts of plans for you. It was a good beginning getting you into this house, wasn't it?

THEO, seriously.

Yes! I've learned my trade. As long as I'm well, I need never be afraid; but——

PERCY

You can't stay here for ever, you know. *Coming closer.* There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, Theo. . . . You don't know how fond I am of you.

THEO, *drawing back a little.*

I oughtn't to stop any longer.

PERCY, *afraid he has gone too far.*

It's all right, my dear child. There's nothing to be afraid of. I really want to help you—only I must see you properly. I would like to take you for a little holiday into the country some day . . . but . . . Let me see. Do you ever go to the theatre?

THEO, *shakes her head.*

We don't get away from here in time—except on Saturdays.

PERCY

Saturdays. Very well then, next Saturday. *He looks at his engagement book.* No, I can't next Saturday, but how about Saturday week? I'll take you to the play, and give you supper afterwards.

THEO

Oh, how delightful it would be—but Phœbe. . . . I couldn't leave Phœbe at home alone.

PERCY

What nonsense. Send Phœbe to a friend. I want you all to myself. I——

Enter Miss Spencer. Theo starts to go.

THEO

Thank you very much, sir, but I—I must go back to my work. Good-bye, sir. She hurries away.

## Scene XVIII

LORD LICKWOOD, POPPY, MISS SPENCER, PERCY.

Lord Lickwood strolls in from the lift, at the same moment that Poppy Price emerges from dressing-room No 2.

POPPY

Hullo! Did you come here to see me?

LORD L.

Mrs. Poppy. What luck! He draws her aside.

PERCY, taking out his watch.

Dear me . . . how late it is, and I've never tried on my own coat. I've been so busy about other people's. Ha! ha! Good-bye—good-bye! No time for the mechanisms of life, such as shaking hands. At the door he sees Miss Spencer. Oh, Miss Spencer, where do you think I could get

some snakes for Lady Jenny—Little Britain, I suppose? Well I must scuffle. Goes out by lift door, followed by Miss Spencer.

## Scene XIX

POPPY, LORD LICKWOOD.

LORD L.

Thank heaven he's gone. . . . I can't stand that frippery idiot. . . . Look here, Mrs. Poppy, you're such a brick always. I saw Grace just now. Can't you go and interrupt Lady Jenny—keep her back, you know, so that I can have one word with Grace. . . . She must be coming out directly.

POPPY

Keep back Jenny? . . . Good gracious! Lickwood, what a mess you are in. . . .

LORD L.

Yes, I am . . . in a devil of a mess. . . . Can't you help me?

POPPY

I can't help those who don't help themselves. Do you mean to tell me that you haven't given Jenny even a hint?

Lord Lickwood, who has sunk into a chair and buried his face in his hands, groans.

LORD L.

How can I do it? . . . How can I?

POPPY, firmly.

Don't be a coward . . . you must. . . . As for Grace—I expect she's thoroughly put off—you never know with nice high-minded girls like that, what they may do. . . . I wouldn't answer for her accepting you now, but I'd take any odds against her doing it after a week of watching you in Jenny's toils. I'm not going to help you any more unless you run straight.

LORD L.

You're quite right . . . of course you are . . . but *do* let me have a word with Grace now—you can manage it.

They both turn as Grace comes out of her dressing-room ready dressed. She looks very shy and embarrassed.

POPPY

I'm so glad you're ready, Grace darling. Just wait one moment for me, and I'll give you a lift. I must speak to Jenny about to-night. She knocks at the door of Jenny's dressing-room. Let me come in, will you. Murmurs as she goes in.

## Scene XX

GRACE, LORD LICKWOOD.

Grace has recovered herself, and now looks at Lickwood quite firmly.

GRACE

I'm so sorry for you, Lord Lickwood, having

to wait . . . it isn't Lady Jenny's fault, you know, these dressmakers are so long always. She buttons and unbuttons her gloves.

LORD L.

You surely can't think . . . ? He stops, embarrassed.

GRACE

But she'll be ready in a moment for you. Her voice trembles a little.

LORD L.

How can you be so cruel—do you think I like being here?

GRACE, with a forced laugh.

Well, you generally do what you like, you're your own master, I suppose. She looks at him fiercely.

LORD L.

Oh, this is awful. I can't stand it. You don't know how it hurts me. I can't explain now—but don't listen to anything you may be told about me. I want you to think well of me. A noise in the background. I must see you alone. Will you give me a chance? . . . I want to explain. . . .

GRACE

You've had plenty of chances during the last three months, haven't you?

LORD L., seizing her hand.

You must promise to let me speak to you . . . at the ball, perhaps? It isn't like you to be unfair. . . . You must hear me.

GRACE, looking up at him.

I'm dining with Lady Jenny to-night. She asked me to come and meet you—perhaps there?

LORD L., drops her hand.

She asked you! Good God! . . .

Grace unable to say anything more turns abruptly away, and goes out.

## Scene XXI

LORD LICKWOOD, POPPY, MISS SPENCER, MANSON, THEO.

The dressing-room door is opened and Poppy comes out.

POPPY

Jenny is just ready. Hullo, has Grace gone? I meant to take her home. She glances at Lickwood, rapidly decides it is no use questioning him, and looks round Let me see—have I got everything?

Miss Spencer and Manson come in through the archway. Manson rings the bell for the lift. Miss Spencer looks about for Poppy's things: at the same moment Theo enters from the archway, carrying some gauze on her arm.

POPPY

Why, I've forgotten all about my flowers.

She runs to the box on the table and unties the string. There, that's for Madame Stéfanie. To Lord L. I always try to propitiate her, especially when I owe her money. She laughs. Come and look, Theo and Miss Spencer. She picks out a little bunch. There, Theo, that's for you—and here, Miss Spencer—you've both been so good about my gown—aren't the lilies lovely? I never forget you, do I, Theo? I love flowers so much myself I like you all to have a share—some people are so selfish.

THEO

Thank you, madame. You are very kind . . . are these all for us? She tries to lift the box. Lord L. starts forward.

LORD L.

Let me help you. . . . Can I carry them?

THEO

Oh, thank you, sir. . . . I can manage. . . . She hoists them under her arm with Lord Lickwood's help.

POPPY

Good-bye, Theo, dear, don't overwork yourself. I'm going to have you all to tea in my garden one of these days, and then you can pick the flowers for yourselves.

THEO

Thank you so much. Stéfanie looks out of dressing-room No. 3.

MADAME STEFANIE

Theo, Theo! What are you doing?

THEO

Here I am, madame. She turns to Poppy. Good-bye again, madame, and thank you. She hurries into dressing-room No. 3.

POPPY

Now, Miss Spencer, I count on you, you've promised me my gown to-night. . . . I simply must have it. I can't think why it isn't finished already. I didn't order mine at the last minute anyway, and if Stéfanie goes and gives Lady Jenny her gown before me—I'll never come here again, that's all.

MISS SPENCER

It will be all right, madame. . . .

POPPY, mollified.

I tell you what I will do—a splendid idea. I'm dining with Lady Jenny Barkstone to-night—quite near by, you know—and I'll ask her to let me dress in her house. That will give you more time, and you can go on working at the gown till ten o'clock. There! Not many ladies would do that—would they? But I hate to be inconsiderate.

MISS SPENCER

Thank you, madame, it is most kind.

POPPY

Good-bye, Lickwood. . . Goes to the lift, turns at the door to wave to Lady Jenny, who comes out of her dressing-room, followed by Madame Stéfanie.

POPPY

Jenny, I've just told them you'll let me dress at your house—you will, won't you? It will be a help to these poor girls; they needn't send my gown till the last minute, you see. She goes out.

## Scene XXII

LADY JENNY, MADAME STÉFANIE, LORD LICKWOOD.

LADY JENNY, to Poppy just disappearing.

Of course—of course. Good-bye. . . . Well, Licky, I haven't kept you long, have I? And I've got masses of things to tell you, and to hear. Oh, my cloak. Miss Spencer picks up the cloak and helps Lady Jenny into it. Thank you. Then I'll come back at four this afternoon. Madame Stéfanie, how can I ever thank you enough, it is too kind of you, you are a real genius. If my dress is half as lovely as Miss Ponsonby's I shall be satisfied. Wasn't she a dream? Looking at Lickwood sharply. In spite of her rage at being caught. How cross she was. Ha! ha! Come along, Licky—four o'clock then. She goes to the lift, followed by Lord Lickwood. Tom Bent is at the door. As soon as they are outside, Madame Stéfanie's manner changes. She looks round.

## Scene XXIII

MADAME STÉFANIE, MISS BURNS, THEO, MISS SPENCER, MANSON.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Manson, Manson, you're never in your

place. Enter Manson from the archway. Miss Spencer, go and fetch Burns and Theo here at once. Miss Spencer goes out. What's this? Picking up a bunch of flowers and reading from a card. "From Poppy Price to Madame Stéfanie, with love." She sniffs and throws them down. Damn the flowers. Why don't she pay her bills. Sniffs again. Hullo! What's this smell of smoke? Who's been 'ere smoking, I should like to know. Percy Wilson, I suppose, drat his impudence. He thinks, because he writes for the papers, he can do everything—but I won't stand it—and then he brings his Lady Jenny here wanting a gown for to-night, and she's not the sort I care to work for. I'm not going to have my place turned into a tea-shop where ladies can meet their young men, I can tell you. . . . Enter Miss Spencer, Burns, and Theo. And I won't have Percy Wilson hanging about here either; he's after one of you, I suppose, and I won't stand it. It's taking liberties with my place—that's what it is. Now look here, Burns, there's another gown to be ready for to-night—now then—don't look scared—I know it can be done, and it shall be done—it's all a question of management. You must put every girl you can on it—do you see?

MISS BURNS

But, madame, I haven't a girl to spare—not one—they're all working for to-night.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Now look 'ere—this is the way it's to be

done; only ten minutes for dinner to-day—there's fifty minutes saved. Tea served in the workroom, there's thirty minutes more, and the work must go on to-night—till every gown is sent off. You must come upstairs too, Spencer, and lend a hand—you must all stay.

THEO

We can't stay to-night, madame—Phœbe's ill.

MADAME STÉFANIE

No shirking now. . . . You'll be paid well for it, never fear.

THEO

It isn't the money . . . but . . .

MADAME STÉFANIE

No buts for me—the gowns are to be finished, and there's the long and short of it. Do you suppose I can disappoint these ladies? It's your own fault, Burns, for not organising better—you've no 'ead, any of you. I'll come and stitch with my own 'ands as soon as I get back, and no one can say I don't share the work. *She hurries away to the door.* Don't stop dawdling here now! *She goes out.*

## Scene XXIV

THEO, BURNS, PHŒBE, MANSON, TOM BENT.

THEO, *stamping her foot.*

I will not stand it. . . . I will not! What right has she to take on another gown when we're driven to death as it is? I won't have

Phœbe worked like this—I won't! Manson and Miss Spencer come close to her.

MISS BURNS

Take care, she might hear you . . . there's Phœbe with Mrs. Price's scarf. To Phœbe. You're too late—she's gone.

PHŒBE

I wanted to ask Theo . . . Miss Burns shrugs her shoulders and hurries off through the archway.

THEO

Come here, little one. Putting her arms round her. You can see for yourselves how ill she is.

PHŒBE

I'm not ill, I'm only tired . . . but we go off to-night anyway, thank goodness.

Enter Tom Bent from the lift. Theo in a hard voice.

THEO

No, we don't. There's another gown come in, and we've all got to stop.

PHŒBE

Oh, dear, I don't believe I can.

TOM

Dang it all—this is a bit too much.

THEO, anxious.

Do you feel bad, my little pet? You're not faint, are you?

PHŒBE

Oh, I'm all right, Theo, dear. . . . You do worry so . . . it'll be Saturday soon, and Tom's going to take us to Hampton Court on Sunday—aren't you, Tom? And we shall sit under the trees . . . it'll be like Heaven. . . . Is the other gown to be ready to-night?—Oh, dear, I must go back. She goes out hurriedly through the archway.

THEO

If I send Phœbe home there's an end of my place as well as hers. . . . Madame wouldn't stand it, I know, and out we should both pack—and then we're done for.

MANSON, smirking.

Lots of people would be ready to help you, Miss Heming, I'm sure.

THEO

What do you mean?

MANSON

Oh, come—none of your humbug. . . . You know quite well Mr. Wilson's clean gone on you.

THEO, indignant.

You've no right to say such things to me! Manson turns away with a laugh.

MISS SPENCER

Don't you worry, dear. It'll all get better soon.

THEO

No, it wont. Someone must let the inspectors know, and stop the work to-night. Manson and Miss Spencer are dreadfully shocked and alarmed. Manson turns to Theo again.

MANSON

Now look here, Miss Theo. I take an interest in you—don't you do anything foolish. I've been here a long time, and I know what happens. Did the last visit of the inspectors do any good? Or the one before? The girls whom the inspector speaks to are dismissed, you know that. Take my advice and keep clear of it all. Things will be quieter when this ball's over.

THEO

Oh, I've heard that sort of thing before. First it's the courts, then the balls, then it's Ascot, Goodwood, a wedding, Cowes, the Moors—don't talk to me about things getting better. I've been wrong to let it slide as long as I have—you shan't crush my spirit. I'm right—and I'll speak. I'll let the inspectors know myself.

TOM

No, you won't, Theo. I'll do it. I'll send word, if I do lose my place. I . . . **The lift bell rings—they all fly apart—Bent to the lift, Theo through the archway, Manson and Spencer get into correct attitudes.**

## Scene XXV

MISS SPENCER, MANSON.

**A lady enters from the lift, moves forward, looks round. Miss Spencer advances, Manson behind her.**

## CURTAIN.

# ACT II

*Time 9 p.m. Scene: One of the workrooms at Madame Stéfanie's. At the back stands a large gas stove on which irons are being heated. There is a door close by, another door to the left, and a window on the right. On the wall hangs a copy of the Factory Act regulations and an overtime form. The large wooden tables are covered with material, and about twenty girls sit at them all working, while Miss Burns moves about superintending. The girls never look up except to get something they want—there is a general air of pressure and hasle. Alice Bates is kneeling in front of a skirt which has been hung on a manequin.*

## SCENE I

THEO, PHŒBE, MISS BURNS, MISS SPENCER, ALICE BATES, LIZZIE GREEN, JESSIE BYLES, TOM BENT, WORK GIRLS.

ALICE, rising.

Miss Heming—this skirt's finished now—is your bodice ready?

THEO, picking up a bodice from the table.

Miss Green, you're ready too, I see. Phœbe —have you got that tulle run?

PHŒBE, wearily.

Here it is, Theo. I might have done it better only——

THEO

Oh, it's all right. Now, Miss Green, just tack it in, carefully, mind, so it's not too high—

and then it can go down. Raising her voice. Miss Burns—here's Mrs. Fancourt's dress ready.

MISS BURNS, gets up from the head of table.

Mrs. Fancourt's! Why I thought that had gone—how slow you girls are. Miss Spencer, you pack it—and Tom . . . Calling. Tom . . .

Enter Tom Bent.

As soon as it's packed take this gown down. It's to go by cab and messenger at once to Mrs. Fancourt, Curzon Street—no mistake now.

PHŒBE

What a fuss Mrs. Price was in this morning, Theo.

THEO

Oh, she's always like that.

ALICE

I wonder how much she spends on her gowns?

JESSIE

If I was madame I wouldn't supply 'er. She never pays till she 'as a writ served on 'er, for all she's so rich!

PHŒBE

She's very kind, you know. I believe madame likes her.

ALICE

Well, I think she's better than that Lady Something who came to-day—bringing her young man along too.

THEO

Lady Jenny, you mean. *Dropping her work for a minute, then picking it up again.* Yes—it's because of her that we're all here to-night—we should have finished at eight if she hadn't wanted this gown.

ALICE

Oh, just don't, I pity all you girls stitching away here. Think of me—in a week I shall be on the blue, blue sea—like it says in the song.

JESSIE

I don't want to go, I'm sure. I've never been on the sea meself—but my sister 'as—and my—she was sick.

LIZZIE

You'll have a bad time at first, Alice, my dear, I know.

THEO

Mind you write and tell us what it's all like.

ALICE, impertinently.

Why, Miss Theo, are you thinking of going on the stage too?—you'd have a good chance with your figure.

THEO

I don't know what I'm going to do. I know Phœbe can't stand this life much longer. Stéfanie drives us like slaves.

ALICE

You'll do just the same when you set up for yourself.

THEO

Set up? Oh, I never shall—it takes money. But if I did, my shop would shut at eight if the Queen herself was hammering at the door.

ALICE

Oh, you're a regular Social Democrat, you are. Where should we be if the ladies didn't want dresses at all?

MISS SPENCER

I think Miss Theo's quite right—ladies ought to have a little more consideration.

JESSIE

Oh, just wouldn't I like to be a laidy. I'd have the loveliest gown—pale pink—and feathers.

There is a general titter.

PHŒBE, letting her hands drop.

I'd like to be a lady too—and have a country home, and lots of lovely flowers—and never be tired.

THEO

I wouldn't be a lady for anything. Tired! Why I tell you they're always tired and worried. I know, I hear them talking when I'm fitting them. I like work when I don't have too much of it. I like the whole thing—seeing the lady—wondering what'll suit—planning it all—getting the beautiful stuffs—and then seeing it grow under your eyes, till at last there it is, a lovely dress, and the lady looks like a princess in a fairy story.

LIZZIE

Well, I must say I do like to see a gown finished.

ALICE

Yes, and if I wasn't going to Africa to-morrow I declare I'd go and see some of our ladies get out of their carriages to-night.

THEO, suddenly.

Alice—as you're leaving—will you answer the inspectors if they do come to-night? Lowering her voice. I'm afraid for Phœbe—and I believe Tom has sent word.

ALICE

Oh, don't mix me up in it, Theo. I've stayed to-night because I w[illegible] week's wages, and madame wouldn't give them to me if I spoke. You take my advice, and don't you answer if they come—you'll only lose your place.

THEO, with a gesture of despair.

Oh, what is to be done!

Enter Madame Stéfanie from the left with a gown on her arm.

## Scene II

THE SAME. MADAME STÉFANIE.

MADAME STÉFANIE

What are you standing there for, Alice Bates?—wasting time, I suppose. Now then, Burns, you're not keeping up the pace, you know.

MISS BURNS

We've just sent down Mrs. Fancourt's dress, madame.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Mrs. Fancourt's! Good Lord, that means there are two more gowns to finish before we can touch Lady Jenny's. Theo, Theo, what have you been doing?

THEO, without looking up.

We can't do more than we've done—we haven't stopped for a minute all day.

MADAME STÉFANIE, walking up and down the tables examining.

Well, you can't stop yet—it's nearly half-past nine. These gowns must be sent off in half an hour—they *must* be. Now, girls, make a *great* effort and get them off before the clock strikes, and then we can put all 'ands on Lady Jenny's.

ALICE, in altercation with another girl.

I *will* ask her. What does it matter to me—this is my last night here anyway. Louder. Madame, we're all so sleepy, couldn't we have some tea?

MADAME STÉFANIE, hesitates for a moment as she looks round.

Tea—good Lord, it's the time—well, look here girls, if those dresses are in their boxes before 9.30—you shall have five minutes off and all go down for a cup of tea.

GIRLS, murmuring.

Oh, thank you—thank you, madame.

MADAME STÉFANIE

But before I go and order it I want to say a word to you—don't stop working now—that's

just like you all when you know there isn't a second to spare, and when I've told you you're going to have some tea too—don't lift your heads, but listen to what I'm going to say without looking up. Tom, Tom!—when you're downstairs just ring the door bell. Tom goes out. I've had this electric bell attached, she lifts it from the floor and puts it on a bracket, so that it can ring in this room when anyone touches the front door bell. Now, girls, I've told Tom to go and ring it, because I want to explain to you that I don't mean to get caught by that lady inspector —like I was last time. The moment that bell rings—— The bell rings very loud with a sharp sound. There it is—do you hear it?—well, so soon as ever you hear that bell you're all of you to pick up your work at once—and run into that room—do you see? The door must be locked. If I'm here I shall turn out all the lights—if I'm not Miss Burns will. And you mustn't make a sound, do you understand? They'll think you're all gone 'ome. We'll do them in the eye. We don't want any inspectors about here—do we girls?—preventing honest people from earning their livings.

ONE OR TWO GIRLS, murmuring.

Oh, no, madame.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Well, I'll go and order tea. As she reaches the door, she turns. And listen to this—if by chance we

*are* caught, you're all of you to refuse to answer any questions—do you understand? They've no business to go asking questions—prying into things which don't concern them—and you've no business to answer—just say nothing. If anyone does answer—well, she'll be sorry after—that's all I can say. She goes out.

A hum of voices as she leaves, discussing the orders. During the following talk the business goes on all the time—girls coming forward to show their work or ask a question—Burns and Theo overlooking everything.

MISS BURNS

Quiet down there—not so much noise.

THEO, in a slightly lower tone.

I don't like this scuttling—why should we hide?—why should we tell lies?

JESSIE

Well, I shall hide for the saike of the firm. I like to keep up the credit of the firm—I do. I've been 'ere ever since madame started, and I'm proud of it. Ten years I've been 'ere.

THEO

Yes—you look as if you had, Miss Byles.

JESSIE, tossing her head.

People aren't always ill because they 'appen

not to be 'igh coloured, Miss 'Eming. I'm sure I don't look any worse than Miss Phœbe, and as I was saying, I think it's a shame to work for a firm and taike no interest in it—so there!

THEO, hotly.

Oh! We all know what your interest means—toadying madame and the young ladies in the shop—always longing to stay late, you are—enjoy having to stop here all night and take a nap on the floor—don't mind if your Saturday afternoon is taken—not you! I don't believe you've got a drop of blood in you—your bones are all made of reels of cotton—and your hair's made of tape—red tape—ha! ha!—and your eyes——

MISS BURNS

Miss Heming, you're talking too much down there.

ALICE, lapsing into familiarity.

Go it, Theo—what are her eyes like?

THEO, after a pause.

I'm sorry, Miss Byles—I didn't mean to be rude. I'm so tired I don't know what I'm saying. I beg your pardon.

JESSIE, tossing her head again.

Granted, Miss 'Eming—no offence taken where none was meant.

Another skirt is put on the manequin and Theo begins arranging it.

LIZZIE

Whose gown is this?

THEO

Why, Mrs. Price's, of course.

PHŒBE

The lady who sends us the flowers—by the way, they haven't come to-day.

LIZZIE

Here they are, in the corner, only there hasn't been time to unpack them.

PHŒBE

Poor flowers—they'll all wither, shut up in that box. She jumps up and opens the box—a lot of lilies fall out. Oh my! Theo, how lovely. She picks up an armful. I feel as if I weren't here any more, but far away somewhere.

LIZZIE

So you will be, Miss Phœbe, if you don't put them down at once and go on——

MISS BURNS, who is still seated at the far end of one of the tables.

You girls will never get done if you can't keep quiet. The clock strikes the half-hour. There, it's half-past nine. Miss Heming, my gown is finished, how's yours?

THEO

Just done, Miss Burns. I don't want any supper. To Miss Byles who is kneeling, fastening on a trimming. Here, I'll fasten that—you go down, and it'll be finished by the time you come back.

JESSIE

Oh, thank you kindly Miss 'Eming. You've got a good 'eart, as I always do say, even if your tongue is a bit sharp now and then.

Phœbe joins the other girls who go out laughing and chattering affectionately. Theo goes on working, and talking to the dress on the stand.

## Scene III

THEO, TOM BENT, PERCY.

THEO

Yes, Mrs. Price, my dear, you're a pretty young woman, and you're quite nice really. I must put an extra tack in here to prevent her young man tearing it when they go waltzing round. She pushes the flowers away impatiently, some of which are lying on the floor. Yes, you're very kind, but oh, dear, how you *aggravate* me sometimes—yes, you do. You never forget to send us those lovely flowers—but what's the good of them to us? They're out of place here—they get in the way. But you don't know that, do you? You think we all lead bright, happy lives. The fact is, my dear, you live in a lovely walled garden. I've

seen pictures of it sometimes, and you sit on the grass among the daisies; but you don't see or hear anything that's going on outside—you don't hear us struggling and crying . . . and yawning. . . . You just think of us kindly, and then you pick the daisies and throw them over the wall. Oh, I'm so tired of it all, Mrs. Price—yes, I am. Why shouldn't Phœbe and I have some of the life of flowers too, instead of this grind, grind all day and all night. I like gardens—I like balls too—I want to be young—and gay—and happy. I've only got one life, and I'm missing everything—it calls me, calls me. Oh, I am so afraid sometimes. What would become of me without Phœbe! O God!—dear God! She buries her face in her hands. Don't take Phœbe away from me—help me . . . keep me good.

The door opens and Percy Wilson looks in. Tom Bent enters, behind him Percy.

TOM, to Theo.

Here's Mr. Wilson. What will madame say? To Percy. I wish you would have waited downstairs, sir. Madame Stéfanie don't allow people into the workrooms, sir.

PERCY

Oh, it's all right, my good fellow. Giving him a tip. I've been up here before now. I'm not a dressmaker—but all the same I can make a dress—ha! ha!—by what I write, you know.

. . . Good-evening, Theo. Lady Jenny is in such a state of nerves about her dress that I said I'd come and get news.

THEO

Good-evening, sir, it's funny to see you up here.

PERCY

Nice room this—do you have it all to yourself?

THEO laughs.

Twenty girls work here—don't you see their chairs?

PERCY

Why are you all alone then?

THEO

They've gone down to have a cup of tea, and I'm finishing Mrs. Price's skirt.

PERCY

Tea at this time of night. How kind Madame Stéfanie is.

THEO

Yes. . . .

PERCY

Rather bad for the nerves though. . . .

Theo begins working at the skirt again.

THEO

You were asking about Lady Jenny's gown—it won't be ready for ever so long—it's hardly pinned together.

PERCY, who has been watching her.

How clever you are with your needle. I love to see you kneeling like that.

THEO

Oh, dear—have *you* been up all night? You're tired too, I'm afraid. Go and have some tea with the others. Laughs.

PERCY, suddenly changing his tone.

How would you like to set up for yourself as a dressmaker, Theo?

THEO pauses.

*Like!* Oh, but what's the good of talking about it.

PERCY

It wants capital, I know, but I believe in you, Theo. I've watched your work, I've got a little money—you've got talent. I could make the ladies come to you if I set you up in a smart street . . . what a success you'd have, Theo.

Theo has risen in excitement.

THEO, clasping her hands.

Do you really mean it? Oh, I've dreamt of something like this happening often and often—to be independent—to be making our own

lives—Phœbe and I. Oh, I know I could do it. I know I could—I feel it here. *Touching her forehead.* I see the gowns all in a moment—just right—and I could get good girls to come and work—and I'd make the ladies look more beautiful than they ever looked before. Oh, Mr. Wilson, don't say any more about it if you don't mean it.

PERCY, *coming closer.*

But I do mean it, my dear. I'm sorry for you, and I'm very fond of you—very. I'd like to get you away from here.

THEO

And Phœbe could come too?

PERCY

You would be able to keep Phœbe in the country . . . feed her up, you know . . . and get her quite strong and well . . . and you wouldn't have to work so hard either . . . or if you did it would be different, doing it for yourself and . . . and for me. . . . But you mustn't fancy I'm only thinking of myself, Theo. . . . I really want to help you up in the world.

THEO

I can't be separated from Phœbe.

PERCY

Oh, you shall keep Phœbe too . . . if you want her, dear—of course you shall. . . .

THEO, almost sullenly.

Wherever I go Phœbe goes—wherever I live Phœbe lives—till she's married.

PERCY

Married—is she engaged?

THEO

Yes, to Tom Bent—he's a good fellow, but it's no use till he's in a better job than he has here. I won't let her marry him yet.

PERCY

Oh, I'll soon see to that. What would you like him to get?—I know—a messengership. . . . I've a good deal of influence—and I think I could get one. Would that please you, Theo? She goes on sewing and makes no answer. Would it make things easier?

THEO

I'd like Phœbe to be happy. I don't think she could find a better, steadier man than Tom, though he is so young.

PERCY, coming closer.

And when she was safe and happy, Theo, you'd remember poor me. I want you to be my little sweet friend;—to keep house for me. I want you more than I've wanted anything in my life—it would be best for you, too, Theo. You would have your own way, you know, with me. . . . How I should spoil you. . . . And you

could have as much fun as there was time for. I should enjoy showing you things—helping you to read books and educate yourself—you're so clever, naturally, I believe you could make quite a career. I'd take you abroad. . . . You'd have everything you want. I believe in the end you would grow to love me. . . . I'm not quite . . .

THEO, working furiously. She speaks with great vehemence as if afraid of her resolution.

Don't say any more . . . don't, I won't hear another word. . . . How dare you come here and dangle these things in front of me. I thought you wanted to be a friend to me really. Leave me alone. I want to be honest. . . . I want to be good. Don't come here with your sympathy and your flowers. We don't want them—do you hear? We'll live our own lives! We're honest anyway . . . and we want to keep honest. . . .

PERCY

You don't understand. . . .

The noise of the girls coming upstairs talking and laughing is heard. Theo finishes off the skirt in a sort of frenzy. Enter the girls, and behind them Madame Stéfanie.

## Scene IV

THE SAME. MADAME STÉFANIE, MISS BURNS, MISS SPENCER, AND ALL THE WORK GIRLS.

THEO

Madame, here's Mr. Wilson come for Lady Jenny's gown.

MADAME STÉFANIE, bustling forward and speaking with her French accent.

Mr. Wilson—sir—it will be all right—see the girls 'ave all 'ad some tea—and now they will finish off Lady Jenny's, and she shall 'ave it by eleven.

PERCY

Then you think it's no good my waiting?

MADAME STÉFANIE

No, certainly not—you go and tell Lady Jenny it's coming—see, here it is.

Theo has taken off Mrs. Price's dress, and is putting Lady Jenny's on to the manequin.

We're setting all the girls on it at once. Please go, sir, you only interrupt.

PERCY

I've come in your own interest. Don't you fail, Madame Stéfanie. In a low voice. Good-night, Theo, I'm sorry you're angry—think it well over, and let me know—any time.

Theo does not answer, and Percy goes out.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Well . . . there's cheek. . . . What right has he to come up here, I'd like to know! Theo, you've been . . . O Lord, there's no time to talk about it to-day. . . . Now then, you and you and you. Singling out girls. Sew on the trimming. Where's the sequin net—there—— Spreading it out on the table. Now you five—cut it out—sew

over in points. Miss Spencer, pack up that gown and send it to Mrs. Price—at Lady Jenny Barkstone's—not her own house—do you understand?

MISS SPENCER

Yes, madame—by cab, I suppose.

MADAME STÉFANIE

You others—run up these long wings and sleeves. . . . Theo, see to the corsage, and then there's the coat—that's it! Oh, come here, Phœbe Heming—you know there's a little tulle vest to go in front. I want it *very* finely gathered. I believe no one does it so well as you—so I'm going to put you on it alone—you can do it I think in half an hour if you work hard.

PHŒBE

Yes, I think I can manage it, madame.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Tom, Tom—here's two more boxes ready—take them down at once. Theo, how about the sleeves? She goes on explaining to Theo. Tom Bent comes in to take the boxes—he stops beside Phœbe.

TOM, in a whisper.

Go home, Phœbe—you look ghastly ill. I can't stand it, my girl.

PHŒBE

I'm all right, Tom, sh—sh—it'll soon be over.

TOM

Dang it all. Madame Stéfanie looks round, and he shoulders the boxes and goes off.

MADAME STÉFANIE, picking up the sleeves.

I'll put them together now while Miss Bates arranges the skirt. Hullo, what's this? Theo starts up as she sees Phœbe fall forward fainting. Sit down, girl, and go on, it's only a faint. She runs to Phœbe and props her up, then speaking to the girls. Don't sit there staring and dropping your hands. I'll manage *her*—go on with your work. Phœbe—my dear—Phœbe—look up, you're all right—you're better now—smell this bottle—there's a brave girl. She calls a girl and says. Stop Tom and tell him to bring some brandy and a glass of water. There, Phœbe—now you're better. I'm going to give you some brandy—that's right—lie on the floor a minute. She makes a pillow out of two or three pincushions and fans Phœbe with a paper pattern, Miss Spencer and Theo helping.

PHŒBE

I'm all right, thank you, madame.

MADAME STÉFANIE

I thought so . . . and you don't want to leave your work half finished, do you, Phœbe?

PHŒBE, in a weak voice.

I think I can finish it, madame, there isn't so much to do.

MADAME STÉFANIE

That's a good girl—you've got spirit. I wouldn't let you, only you know there isn't a girl here who can do that fine running as you can—that's right—now then putting her into a chair is the light right for you? That's better—oh, here's Tom with the water. Tom, did you put a drop of brandy in as I told you?

TOM

Yes, madame—here, Phœbe—I brought some plain in a glass.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Yes, that's better. Phœbe drinks it.

PHŒBE

Oh, Tom, thank you so much, I'm all right now. She begins to work again. Tom goes to the door but stops to listen.

MADAME STÉFANIE, turning to Theo.

Go back to your work at once. She's all right. It's only the heat that's upset her.

THEO

She's dying for want of rest—she must come away! The doctor warned me there was danger of hemorrhage. I shall take her home at once. Lady Jenny's gown must be finished by somebody else. I'm going home, I say, with Phœbe. I'm not going to have her killed for anyone's gown or anyone's reputation—here, Phœbe, put your things on and come.

PHŒBE

I'm all right, sister, now—really I am.

MADAME STÉFANIE

You're mad—finish this dress, and then we'll see about 'ome—go on—do what I tell you. Theo does not move. Mark my words, Miss Theo—you stop this impertinence of yours, or it will be the worse for you. You're not going to budge from this room till that job's done. You're getting hysterical. Phœbe's all right again—and what's more—— At this moment the electric bell rings. What's that? Damn!—the inspectors! Now, girls, quick! quick!—remember what I told you—here, take off the dress—that's right—not a sound in there—where's the key? Go down slowly, Tom, and open the door!

Tom hurries from the room. All the girls have jumped up collecting their work in their hands and huddle into the room by the door on the right. Phœbe and Theo are the last to go; Theo very unwillingly. Madame Stéfanie locks the door after them, then runs round the room turning off the electric light, leaving, however, the gas stove lit. She is exactly opposite the door when it is sharply opened and Miss Donaldson walks in.

## SCENE V

MADAME STÉFANIE. MISS DONALDSON.

MISS DONALDSON

Good-evening. I am one of His Majesty's Inspectors.

MADAME STÉFANIE, in her French accent.

Good-evening. I thought as much. I 'eard the bell ring, and I come out to see.

MISS DONALDSON

Is there no other workroom beyond? Pointing to the door.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Certainly not—that's my bedroom.

MISS DONALDSON, goes up to the copy of the Act and reads it.

Will you let me have a light, please? Madame Stéfanie turns on a lamp. I see your hours are eight to eight. Is that the time you always leave off?

MADAME STÉFANIE

Yes, of course.

MISS DONALDSON, looking at another paper on the wall.

You have an overtime form, I notice. You seem to have used it very little.

MADAME STÉFANIE

I don't like to keep my 'ands up late.

MISS DONALDSON

I see your last entry is two months ago. I suppose you always notify the Home Office?

MADAME STÉFANIE

Of course I do. I don't want to break the law.

MISS DONALDSON

Then you left off at eight to-night?

MADAME STÉFANIE

Certainly—anything more?

MISS DONALDSON

There's a great deal of work lying about—are you quite sure you left off to-night at eight?

MADAME STÉFANIE

Of course I did—the girls are so careless. I do nothing but tell them to cover up all the things before they leave—but you know what girls are—they won't do it—and I lose pounds and pounds a year by the stuff that gets spoilt.

MISS DONALDSON

Yes, it's most annoying that. Can't you make your forewoman see to it?

MADAME STÉFANIE

She's as bad as the rest. I tell you it's no good unless I'm here myself. You see, I 'appened to be out to-night, and here's the result.

MISS DONALDSON, *dryly.*

Quite so. I notice the iron stove is still alight.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Alight! So it is—the girls are that ungrateful. I let them make their tea here—extra tea, you know, at seven—and then they forget to turn the gas off. It's too bad, wasting my money in this way. But it's always the same, the more kindness you show, the more your kindness is abused.

MISS DONALDSON, looks at her watch.

I see—it must have been burning three hours then—how very tiresome for you. She suddenly steps towards one of the lamps and puts her hand on it. How odd—this lamp is quite hot.

MADAME STÉFANIE

I turned it out as you come in. You see, I pass through here to go to bed, and the light is left on for me to see my way—in a moment I should have noticed the stove was left.

Miss Donaldson goes quickly round to all the other lamps.

MISS DONALDSON

All the lamps are hot—do you have them all kept alight? . . . I'm afraid I can't accept your statements. I should like that door opened, please. I must examine the room beyond.

MADAME STÉFANIE, standing in front of the door and crossing her arms and speaking in her Cockney accent.

You shall not go in there, you've no right

to, that's my bedroom. You call yourself a lady, I suppose. Sniffing A pretty lady, to come poking and prying into other people's business. You leave me alone now,—you've wasted enough of my night's rest as it is with your meddling ways and sneaking questions.

MISS DONALDSON, taking a paper out of her note-book.

I am sorry to have to insist—but I must have the door opened at once. If you challenge my authority, examine my warrant.

MADAME STÉFANIE, brushes it away, and then very unwillingly pulls the key out of her dress, puts it in the lock and turns it, talking all the while.

And so this is the law, is it?—the law—bah! —here am I—a poor woman doing my best to earn my living honestly—giving employment to over a hundred girls, one way and another. You'd have thought the law would 'elp me. Not a bit of it. 'Elp me! Why it does everything it can to 'inder me. You'll drive all trade away, that's what you'll do. 'Ow am I to keep things going if I can't call my place my own—it's disgraceful. And 'ow anyone who calls herself a lady can demean 'erself to these interfering ways is more than I can swallow. I may break the law now and then, but I'm not a spy.

MISS DONALDSON

I am waiting, Madame Stéfanie, to have the door opened.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Oh, yes, I'll open it! You'll find some girls there, I don't deny. I've 'idden them because

I knew you wouldn't understand. They've stayed on willingly to do their own work. Raising her voice greatly for the girls to hear her.

MISS DONALDSON

Thank you. I will speak to the girls myself.

Madame Stéfanie throws open the door, the girls are seen all close to the threshold, some are laughing, some look frightened, and all are shy.

## Scene VI

THE SAME. THEO, PHŒBE, MISS SPENCER, MISS BURNS, TOM BENT, WORK GIRLS.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Come in, girls, and show the inspector you're not starving, and that I don't beat you all day long—she won't believe me.

MISS DONALDSON

Good-evening.

A confused murmur in reply—silence—a long pause. Tom enters the room cautiously and watches.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Well, my lady, why don't you begin to ask them 'ow many bruises they've got—if they 'ave enough to eat—are their shoes thick enough? And this is what is called being in Government service—breaking into private 'ouses in the middle of the night. Let me tell you, miss, I'll be even with you some day. You're a damned spy—that's what you are—a damned paid spy.

MISS DONALDSON, to the girls.

Why are you here to-night?

No one answers—one or two giggle,

MISS DONALDSON

I want you to tell me why you are here at this hour? You need not be afraid to answer.

A long pause—at last Miss Burns steps forward.

MISS BURNS

I don't suppose we ought to have allowed it, madame, but the fact is the girls begged so hard to stay and work at some clothes of their own, and madame very kindly allowed them to use the room and the lights.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Yes—and that doesn't cost me nothing!

MISS DONALDSON

Why did you all run away then when I came?

MISS BURNS

We thought you would misunderstand, madame.

MISS DONALDSON, picking up the sequin bodice of Lady Jenny's gown which Theo holds.

You must get very good wages if you are able to make yourself a gown like this.

Theo says nothing, but turns her head away as if in disgust with the whole scene. Miss Donaldson picks up another bit of the gown from Alice.

MISS DONALDSON

And you too?

ALICE

Well, I'm going on the stage—this is my last night here,

MISS DONALDSON

Indeed—and are these dresses being made for you then?

ALICE, naively.

Oh, no, miss—oh, no.

MADAME STÉFANIE, seeing her chance.

Some of the girls are helping Alice Bates with the dresses—isn't that it, girls?

No one answers except Lizzie.

LIZZIE, feebly.

Yes, madame.

MISS DONALDSON

What time did you leave off work last night?

MADAME STÉFANIE

If anyone answers a single question she will 'ave all her Saturday afternoons taken away—do you understand? I'm not going to 'ave my 'ands questioned about my business, and terrorised over in my own 'ouse. If you want information you can ask me.

MISS DONALDSON

You have already tried to mislead me, Madame Stéfanie. I wish now to question your girls. And if *you* will not terrorise them I believe they will tell me the truth. Turning to the girls. What time did you begin this morning?

MADAME STÉFANIE

No one is to answer—there'll be short work with a girl who answers any question—she'll be dismissed from my employment at once—understand that.

MISS DONALDSON

I am speaking to the girls—not to you, please. Now, *singling out Jessie,* you tell me—what time did you begin this morning?

*Madame Stéfanie from behind the inspector's back holds up eight fingers.*

JESSIE, *feebly.*

Eight o'clock, miss.

*There is a slight movement among the girls.*

MISS DONALDSON

Do you always begin at eight?

*Madame Stéfanie signs to her to say yes.*

JESSIE

Yes, miss.

MISS DONALDSON

And what time do you stop?

*Madame Stéfanie again holds up eight fingers.*

JESSIE

Eight o'clock, miss.

MISS DONALDSON

Always?

JESSIE

Yes, miss.

MISS DONALDSON

And what did you stay here to night for then?

JESSIE

I was doing my own dress.

MISS DONALDSON, speaking to Alice.

What time did you begin work this morning?

ALICE, hesitates for a moment, then sees Madame Stéfanie looking at her, and says defiantly,

I'm sure I don't remember, miss.

MISS DONALDSON

I can only conclude there is an attempt to deceive me, in which you are being forced to join. By obstructing me, Madame Stéfanie, you expose yourself to a penalty of £40, and by frightening your girls into silence you expose them to the same penalty. It is my duty to ascertain if the law has been broken. I put the question again. What time did you begin work this morning?

No one answers.

The law is for your protection, but it can do nothing for you if you yourselves try to defeat it. She speaks to Lizzie. What time did you begin work this morning?

LIZZIE, after a pause, looking round uneasily.

Eight o'clock, miss.

MISS DONALDSON, disregarding, and speaking to Phœbe.

Will you answer my question?

PHŒBE, clasping her hands together and pleading.

Oh, don't ask me, miss—please, please, don't.

THEO, suddenly stepping forward.

I'll answer your questions, miss, and I'll tell you the truth.

MISS DONALDSON

Good. She opens her note-book. Why are you here to-night?

THEO

To finish up the gowns for the Duchess of Berkshire's ball, miss.

MISS DONALDSON

To-day is Friday. When did you begin work on Monday?

THEO

At seven o'clock.

MISS DONALDSON

And Tuesday?

THEO, hesitating for a moment as if trying to remember.

Six-thirty—no, six—Tuesday and Wednesday.

MISS DONALDSON

And Thursday?

THEO

Thursday? Oh—we didn't go home Wednesday night at all.

MISS DONALDSON

Did you get any sleep?

THEO

We had an hour or two when we could be spared.

MISS DONALDSON

And last night?

THEO

Some of them lay down on the floor with a pillow for a short time.

MISS DONALDSON

How early do you generally start work?

THEO

Never later than seven.

MISS DONALDSON

How long did you have for dinner to-day?

THEO

Ten minutes.

MISS DONALDSON

And tea?

THEO

Five minutes.

MISS DONALDSON

Thank you, that will do. You can swear to these answers being true?

THEO

Yes.

MISS DONALDSON

Now I want your name and address.

THEO

Miss Heming, 10, Lavender Grove, Camberwell.

There is a pause. Madame Stéfanie is red in the face with anger—the girls are all awed.

MISS DONALDSON, bowing to the girls.

Good-night!—good-night! You will hear from the Department later, Madame Stéfanie.

Miss Donaldson goes out.

## Scene VII

MADAME STÉFANIE, THEO, PHŒBE, MISS SPENCER, MISS BURNS, TOM BENT, WORK GIRLS.

Madame Stéfanie, after closing the door, comes forward overcome with rage. She almost strikes Theo. Phœbe stands close by her sister holding her hand.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Very well, Miss Theo, this is 'ow you serve me, is it? I've kept you, and 'elped you for

three years, and this is the end of it. You must play the tell-tale, must you, and give me away to the inspector. But I won't stand this from you or anyone. You leave my service to-night —never you cross my door again. You go to-night without your wages—and don't let me see your face any more. I don't like your ways of going on with Mr. Wilson either—I like respectable girls, I do. And your snivelling sister with her fainting fits can go too. I've no place for girls like you 'ere. I shall take pretty good care to let everyone know that you're neither of you fit to take into a decent workroom—and after two or three months, when you come creeping to me to take you back, as I know you will, you'll find out what sort of woman you 'ave to deal with, and you'll be sorry you didn't stand by me. She turns fiercely on the girls. There you stand like a flock of sheep—get to your work at once. Looking at her watch. It's just eleven. Oh, what am I to do?—I'm ruined —I've never failed a lady yet, it's my pride—and here's this gown in bits. Lady Jenny can't wear it. She begins to cry hysterically. It's too much for anyone to stand, and after I've worked so 'ard too.

MISS SPENCER

Madame, it's not so bad as that. Set the girls on the cloak, and if you send Miss Theo to Lady Barkstone with the bodice and skirt she could sew the trimming on her—and not try to finish.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Eh? What's that you say? Of course it's no use finishing. Lady Jenny must go to the ball in 'alf an hour—you're right. It's the only thing to do. Here you, Theo, you're still in my service, and if you want your week's wages do what I tell you. Take the skirt and the bodice—they're almost ready. You can fasten the sleeves and the trimming on her—it'll keep her quiet—and meanwhile the girls and I will set at the long cloak, and I'll bring it after. Phœbe, you come here at once and finish the running. And when I've done with you to-night——

Phœbe rises and totters forward apparently choking. She is caught by Miss Spencer—the handkerchief which she holds to her mouth is dyed red. Theo runs to her, almost beside herself.

THEO

You've killed her—you've killed her.

Phœbe is helped into a chair after a moment she revives a little and smiles wanly.

THEO

Phœbe . . . darling. . . . What is it? . . . are you better . . . there. . . . She's moving her lips . . . don't speak, Phœbe.

MADAME STÉFANIE, coming over to her, and after looking at Phœbe a moment.

Miss Spencer, you take her 'ome—and you may have a cab—and you, Theo, take Lady Jenny's gown at once. Your sister will be all right directly—there! she's opened her eyes—it's nothing serious. Take the gown, I say—do you hear? Phœbe shall go home in a cab.

Miss Burns has been to the door and beckoned to Tom to come in—he enters and waits.

THEO

I'm not going to leave Phœbe, I tell you. You've killed her, and I never mean to come here again. And I don't want your cab, thank you—give me my week's money and we'll go.

MADAME STEFANIE, crossing her arms.

Oh, you'll go, will you, and leave me in the lurch. You know very well there isn't anyone else in the place beside you who has Lady Jenny's gown in her head—and you want to ruin me—first you send for the inspector, and then you chuck me. I'll pay you in your own coin—not a farthing of your money do you touch if you don't do what I tell you now.

TOM stepping forward.

You've no right not to pay her by law.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Oh, you're in this too, are you? Let me give you a word of warning. Say another word about it, and you lose your place too. I can find plenty of lift men as good as you. 'Ave the law on me, will you?—bah! I snap my fingers at the law. . . . 'Ave you got any money for the solicitor? . . . Not you . . . nor you either, Miss Theodosia Heming, and you won't get no money unless you go to Lady Jenny—and go this instant. She turns away, shaking with rage, and begins to work.

MISS SPENCER, to Theo.

Phœbe's better now—aren't you, Phœbe? You'd better go, Theo—you musn't lose your week's money, you know,

THEO, stroking Phœbe's hand.

I can't leave her.

MISS SPENCER

I'll take her home, madame said I could, and I won't leave her till you get back, and Tom shall go for a doctor. You'd better go, Theo. Phœbe will want a lot of care after this—you go now and trust her to me.

Theo gets up half dazed.

MISS SPENCER

Madame, may Tom call a cab for me and Phœbe, and I'll see her home? Theo will take the gown at once.

MADAME STÉFANIE, packing the gown into a box.

I'm glad she's come to her senses—there—put it on to Lady Jenny—do you hear?—and sew the sleeve wings on her—and tell her I'm coming with the coat—do you understand? Theo, who is putting on her hat, nods. Tom, get two cabs—one for Phœbe and one for Theo.

TOM, shouldering the box.

I'll come up, Miss Spencer, and help to carry Phœbe down—we're ready now.

He goes towards the door, followed by Theo, who stops to look anxiously at Phœbe for a moment. Phœbe smiles and holds out her hand. Theo goes—Tom follows. Madame Stéfanie calls out without looking up from her furious sewing.

"Another cab for me in a quarter of an hour."

CURTAIN.

# ACT III

*Time, 10 p.m. Scene: The drawing-room at Lady Jenny Barkstone's. At the back to the right are French windows giving on to a garden. The windows are open, and through them is seen a house beyond the trees, brilliantly lit up. At the back to the left is a door into the dining-room. A door on the right opens on to the staircase leading to the bedroom floor, and double doors on the left open into the entrance hall. The drawing-room is luxuriantly furnished, a big piano stands near the window, and there are quantities of flowers.*

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## SCENE I

POPPY, PERCY WILSON.

The dining-room door opens and Poppy enters. She is dressed like a Spanish dancer as far as her waist, then has an ordinary evening skirt, and wears a thin chiffon wrap over the whole. Lord Lickwood holds the door open for her. She calls back into the dining-room.

POPPY

No, it's not a bit of good. I know you all think I'm fussy and tiresome, but my skirt has come, and I'm going to finish dressing. Laughter and voices from inside. Yes, I know it only takes a minute, but it mayn't be right. Besides . . . Percy enters from the hall in fancy dress—a black court suit. Oh, Percy, you're ready, and I'm only half done. She touches her skirt and lifts it a little to show her stockings and dancing shoes. Stéfanie sent home my bodice at seven, and now the skirt's upstairs . . . but . . .

PERCY, striking an attitude.

I went to see about Lady Jenny's gown at half-past nine, and I've been home and dressed, and here I am. Good, isn't it? My get-up is rather subtle, don't you think?

POPPY

Splendid! But, Percy, she goes close up to him, have you got my invitation?

PERCY, holding out his hands in deprecation.

The duchess simply wouldn't listen. At last she said, "I shan't believe Lickwood is free till he's engaged to some girl. If Mrs. Price can bring that off to-night, she shall come to the ball—not unless."

POPPY

Oh, Percy!

PERCY

It's too bad of the duchess, it is indeed—she wouldn't believe a word I said. She'll be sorry when Lickwood really is engaged.

POPPY

What's the good of that? The ball will be over then—to-night! to-night! She pauses a moment thinking. I won't give in yet. I wish I could see Lickwood. I believe he wanted to speak to me.

PERCY, admiringly, peering through the half-open door into the dining-room.

You *are* a good stayer. You deserve to succeed. I'll get Lickwood for you. They're all standing about. He opens the door wider. Lickwood, he beckons to him, don't you agree with me that Poppy's gown ought . . .

Lord Lickwood by this has entered, and Percy steps into the dining-room behind him and closes the door.

## Scene II

POPPY AND LORD LICKWOOD.

LORD L., in a kilt.

Mrs. Poppy, what am I to do? Grace won't speak to me—you saw how she turned her back on me the whole of dinner?

POPPY

I don't wonder as Jenny was on your other side.

LORD L.

How can you be so cruel, when I'm utterly miserable?

POPPY

Have you broken with Jenny?

LORD L.

I haven't had a chance. I've never seen her alone—one can't do this sort of thing in public.

POPPY

Yes, one can—it's much easier in public. I

UofM

should never have got Gerald to the point if I hadn't proposed to him across a dinner-table—so I know. Take Jenny into a corner when you all come in here; now go along back—this is too silly. *She pushes him towards the door.*

LORD L.

But you will help me, won't you?

POPPY

Do what I tell you, and . . . *She opens the dining-room door and Lickwood goes out.*

## Scene III

POPPY, GRACE.

*Poppy stands for a moment in the middle of the room thinking, and then she goes to the staircase door and opens it, goes out for an instant, comes back, closes staircase door loudly, and runs across the drawing-room to dining-room door, opens it again and calls in.*

POPPY

Grace! . . . Grace! . . . will you come one moment and help me?

*Grace comes out of the dining-room. She looks dispirited and tired. She is dressed in her water nymph gown.*

GRACE

What is it . . . your gown?

POPPY

Grace, there's only one minute—they'll be out directly, and my maid is waiting upstairs. I want you to be just a little nicer to Lickwood.

You don't know how frightened he is of you. Do you think it's quite kind to snub him as much as you do?

GRACE

I think he wants snubbing.

POPPY

What nonsense! He's so desperately in love with you he can only talk in jerks. Don't be silly, Grace, he's doing his best to propose to you to-night.

GRACE

Well, if he does, I shall refuse him!

POPPY, horrified.

Refuse him? . . . Oh, no . . . my dear Grace—the thing's impossible. Refuse the best match in England, when you've the luck to be in love with him too! What's the matter?

GRACE

You know perfectly well. . . .

POPPY

You mean you're jealous of Jenny . . . make your mind quite easy on that score. Lickwood is sick to death of her—and——

GRACE, puts her hands to her ears and gives a smothered scream.

Don't, don't! Can't you see it's anguish to me—you don't understand. I thought Lord Lickwood was strong and good—I thought . . .

POPPY

Good!—so he is—one of the best young men I know.

GRACE, vehemently.

How can a man be good who makes love to another man's wife?

POPPY, after a pause.

That's how you've been brought up, I suppose. . . . I was too—but I know a little more about life now.

GRACE, with heat.

That's just it—everybody is wicked, and so you think it doesn't matter. But it matters to me. I loathe the sort of easy tolerance you all get—I loathe it, I tell you.

She throws herself into a chair and bursts out crying. Poppy looks at her whimsically for a moment, then tenderly goes to her, puts her arms round her, and makes her look up.

POPPY

Grace, darling . . . don't cry—you musn't think I can't understand. I do absolutely. I know how odious it is when you first begin to realise something of what goes on under the surface, but don't ruin your life. It's all horrid, but take my word for it, Lickwood has only done what almost any other rich, idle man would have done in his place. Jenny's a grabber—and he's a little weak—that's all. You don't know how easily men slip into that sort of position. Lickwood has never been really in love with Jenny—never.

GRACE, drying her eyes.

That only makes it worse.

POPPY

No, it doesn't—not for you and the future—Lickwood has kept his heart for his wife.

GRACE

He hasn't got a clean heart to give now.

POPPY

No, he hasn't—but are you sure you have?

GRACE, starts guiltily.

What do you mean? Oh, Poppy, how do you know? Who told you?

POPPY, surprised.

Who told me? What are you talking about?

GRACE, looking down, very much ashamed.

I thought you knew about Prince Larinsky. I let him kiss me once—and . . .

POPPY, in mock horror.

Oh, Grace . . . how could you. . . . She laughs as she kisses her. You'll have to ask Lickwood to forgive you now. . . . She laughs again. But, seriously, listen to me . . . if you want to save Lickwood, and make a man of him, accept him . . . you are the woman who can do it—he'll never look at anyone else if you marry him and love him. If you don't—and he goes downhill—it will be your fault!

GRACE

Oh . . . that would be terrible. . . . Perhaps you're right—but don't let him speak to me to-night—make him wait.

POPPY

No—no—he musn't wait . . . there are all sorts of reasons why he had better not wait—and you mustn't either. . . . I'm bent on your being engaged to-night. *She laughs again.*

GRACE

How strange you are. . . . What are you laughing at?

POPPY

I can't tell you.

GRACE, *getting up.*

You must.

POPPY

No . . . no. . . . Yes, I will. . . . If you accept Lickwood to-night I promise I'll tell you when you've been married five whole years—I shouldn't dare before. *Noise of people coming out of the dining-room door which is opened.* Good heavens! here they are. I must fly—don't say I've been here, so long. I shall be back again in two minutes, there's only my skirt to . . .

*She has reached the door and goes out.*

## SCENE IV

LADY JENNY, PERCY WILSON, LORD LICKWOOD, GERALD PRICE, GRACE PONSONBY.

Enter Lady Jenny, followed by the rest. Gerald Price in a red hunting coat.

LADY JENNY, to Grace.

Hullo! has Poppy done with you? She turns. We'll have coffee and cigarettes all together here. Grace, dear, play us something, will you? I want soothing. I'm so anxious . . . about my gown! Mr. Price . . . will you kindly open the piano for her. . . . Play something bright and loud, Grace. I think I want cheering more than soothing.

Gerald Price goes to the piano. Percy moves the stool for Grace, who begins to play. Gerald leans over the piano listening. Lord Lickwood looks on helplessly while this is happening.

LADY JENNY, to Lickwood.

That's right. . . . Come and sit by me. I have hardly had a word with you. She makes him sit on a sofa with her. What's the matter with you Licky? I put you next me at dinner and you scarcely uttered . . . Have you been losing again?

LORD L., looking down.

Yes—but it isn't that. A pause—neither speak.

LADY JENNY, vehemently.

You're going to throw me over—that's what it is.

LORD L., gets up uneasily.

It isn't you—it's the circumstances. I can't stand the position—I hate lying.

LADY JENNY, vehemently.

You're in love with Grace Ponsonby . . . in love again . . . that's all. She puts great contempt into her voice, which stings him.

LORD L.

No, not again. I mean . . . oh, this is quite different. . . . I'm ashamed before her. . . .

LADY JENNY, half crying.

Ashamed . . . of me, I suppose? . . . You're a mean cad! I only hope you won't treat her as you're treating me. . . . I should like to tell her what you are. Lord Lickwood sits down beside her and takes her hand. She fights with her tears. I suppose I'm a fool to give in so easily and accept it all, but I can't help it—I'm too proud to fight . . . much too proud.

PERCY, at the piano applauding as the playing stops.

Perfect, perfect. Now, Miss Grace, do play that swishey swashey thing that always makes me feel as if I were floating on the sea—you know.

GERALD, drawling.

Good Lord! The mere thought of you in the sea is enough to put me off!

Grace begins to play again. Lady Jenny, seeing that the group is absorbed once more, puts her hand on Lickwood's arm.

LADY JENNY

Look here, Licky . . . there must be no fuss over this . . . do you understand? People

have hardly begun to gabble, and I'm not going to play the deserted woman game. I've been away. I come back and ask you and Grace to meet like a good fellow—you understand—and it's all a success, and the sooner you marry her the better.

LORD L.

Oh, thank you—thank you for taking it like this. I always said you were a real good sort, and now you've proved it—you don't know what a load you've lifted off me.

LADY JENNY, stamping her foot as she gets up.

I won't have you calling me a good sort. I hate you . . . I hate you. . . .

She moves away from him quivering, just when Poppy enters from the staircase, fully dressed as a Spanish dancer. She makes a curtsy to the company; they crowd round her, all but Lady Jenny, who stands at the writing table, pretending to fiddle with her writing things.

POPPY, to the company generally.

Isn't it lovely? Stéfanie really has surpassed herself.

GERALD

Do you mean in the price?

Grace and Lord Lickwood join in. Percy seeing Jenny alone crosses over to her.

PERCY, in a low tone.

Brave, brave woman—you've done it, I see.

LADY JENNY, furtively drying her eyes.

It's awful—and the worst of all is to come. Everyone will pity me—even the duchess.

PERCY

No, no. You must follow out my policy to the end—you must be clever as well as brave. . . . Let me see . . . I know. . . . Sit down at once and write this little note to the duchess.

LADY JENNY

Write and tell her. . . . She sits down. You can't mean it?

PERCY

Listen! Write what I say—you needn't send it if you don't like.

"My dear Duchess,—I must— because I am so full of it—tell you that your boy is practically engaged to Grace Ponsonby. I feel I have a right to give you this piece of news, because I frankly admit I have done all I could to further the match. I am so fond of both of them. He is a dear, and she is the nicest girl I know—nice enough to be your daughter-in-law, and I can't say more than that. Don't tell Lickwood I told you first, but I simply couldn't resist it. I am so happy over this affair, and I want you to be too. *Au revoir*, to-night at your ball.—Yours affectionately, JENNY B."

LADY JENNY, doubtfully.

Are you sure it's all right?

PERCY

Of course—of course—she'll be very sorry

she's misjudged you so. He picks up a piece of paper and an envelope. Now can I ring?

Percy moves across to the bell, rings, then turns and goes close to Poppy and stands beside her, scribbling a note on the paper he has in his hand.

PERCY, reading in a low tone to Poppy as he writes.

Listen to this: "My beloved duchess. Read Lady Jenny's letter and send Mr. and Mrs. Price's invitation under cover to me here at once.—Your devoted PERCY."

Sh! sh! listen.

Enter a footman.

LADY JENNY

Take this letter across to Lickwood House, please, directly—say it's important.

PERCY

Er . . . Lady Jenny!—might your man take a note from me and wait for an answer? . . . I've been arranging something for the duchess.

LADY JENNY

Oh, certainly.

Percy hands the note to the footman, who advances.

POPPY, in a low tone of exultation to Percy.

Percy, you really are a genius—oh, how happy I am. Turns towards the others. I must dance—I simply must. Grace, play a valse. I want to rehearse before I go to the ball.

She pirouettes round while Grace plays. Lickwood and Gerald look on admiringly. Lady Jenny summons Percy by a gesture of her head.

LADY JENNY

I shall never be able to stand this—just look at Lickwood gazing into Grace's eyes exactly as he used to gaze into mine. I shall go away somewhere by myself—into the country.

PERCY, with decision.

You musn't think of such a thing—nothing would make people talk more than that. You must get a lot of new clothes and play your part like a heroine.

LADY JENNY, brightening a little.

New clothes—perhaps—but I can't go to the ball to-night. I'm too miserable—much too miserable.

A footman enters. Poppy stops dancing.

FOOTMAN.

A young lady from Bath Street has come with your dress, my lady.

LADY JENNY, turning round with a radiant face.

My dress! . . . Oh, Percy, my dress has come. Grace jumps up from the piano abruptly. Lady Jenny turns to the footman again. Bring her in James. The footman goes out We'll just look at it here—and then I'll go and dress directly.

PERCY.

I'm so glad, my dear. I told you it would come all right. People will go early—you mustn't dawdle, you know.

## Scene V

THE SAME. THEO, MADAME STÉFANIE.

Enter Theo with the footman carrying a large box, which, on a gesture from Lady Jenny, he puts down in the middle of the floor.

LADY JENNY

Here you are at last! I was beginning to think you would never come. Take off the lid and let's look at it.

Theo does as she is bidden, but before finishing, stops and looks up.

THEO

I ought to tell you, madame, that the gown is not really finished. Madame is bringing the drapery with her in a few minutes, and I am to sew the last stitches on you—so as to save time.

LADY JENNY

Not finished yet! And it's half-past ten. I never heard anything so disgraceful. Look here, Pecksey, it's almost in pieces. Picking up bits out of the box. Good heavens, is this the sleeve? Oh, what am I to do, *everything* has gone wrong with me to-night.

THEO, quietly.

I think, madame, if you will put the dress on, I can show you that it only requires a few stitches—and when madame brings the drapery——

LADY JENNY

If you think, young woman, that I'm going to that ball just pinned together anyhow you've made the mistake of your life. I'd rather not go at all than not be a success. Oh, it really is too disgusting. If Madame Stéfanie had told

me straight off she couldn't do it, I should have understood. I should have gone to somebody else—but no—she only thinks of making money and promises what she knows is impossible. You ought to be ashamed to bring a gown in this condition—what have you been doing all day long?

THEO, looking up sharply.

What have we been doing? Working till we can hardly see—working all day and all night too.

LADY JENNY, looking at her coldly.

Well, I suppose you're paid for it, aren't you? What I say is, that you shouldn't promise to do things when you know you can't—it isn't fair.

THEO, in a hard voice.

Why don't you say that to Madame Stéfanie instead of to me. Do you suppose I have anything to do with what is taken in?

The company gather round her.

LADY JENNY

Don't be impertinent—your tone is insufferable. I shall complain of you to Madame Stéfanie.

THEO, very angry.

Oh, complain if you like . . . it won't make any difference to me now. Do you know what your ladyship's dress has cost me? My place and my sister's place.

PERCY, in a low tone.

Theo! . . . Theo! remember where you are.

THEO, beside herself.

Oh, I know where I am all right. . . . I'm among some of the ladies whose gowns we've made. Yours. To Lady Jenny and, in a softer tone, to Miss Ponsonby. And yours, miss. Every day for three weeks we've been at work from seven in the morning till eleven, twelve, and sometimes one at night. We never went to bed at all last night or the night before . . . drive, drive, drive, with only a few minutes to cram the food down our throats. Perhaps you don't know it's against the law to work more than twelve hours—but it is—and so it ought to be. We could do the work if you gave us time. But here's her ladyship angry because we're behind with the gown. When did she order it? Only this morning. You don't know what that means, you ladies. I don't believe you want us to work till we're ill and silly and dazed—you're too kind. But that's what happens. You never see us—we're away upstairs in the workrooms. There we are always stitching—cold often, when you're warm round your fires—hot, stifling hot, when you're in your cool rooms—stitching when you're all fast asleep. Some of us can stand it . . . some of us can't—some of us get weaker day by day, and there's never a chance to pull round—and if you fall out, your place is filled directly. I've seen my sister faint away to-night—do you think she was allowed to go home? Certainly not—Lady Jenny's gown must be finished. And then comes the inspector lady. She

asks us all questions—anyone who speaks the truth is dismissed. She asked Phœbe—I answered. What's the result? We're both turned off. Phœbe's taken ill—spits up blood. Do you think I'm allowed to take her home then? Certainly not—Lady Jenny's gown has got to be finished, or I lose my week's wages as well as my place. Oh, don't any of you fancy your gowns are made of silk and satin only—our life and strength goes into them too. Do you think we don't want time to live and breathe, and feast a little also? Sometimes the chance of it comes very near us—in an ugly way—do you think it's always easy to resist—when you're deadbeat, and your life is choked with work? Don't your silk skirts tell you how hungry we are for happiness? Don't they tell you how fierce temptation is? And how in the end we don't care—we don't care.

She turns away, quivering with her emotion.

LORD LICKWOOD, under his breath.

By God! it's a shame.

Poppy and Grace hesitate for a moment, then they both go up to Theo. Poppy takes her hand and pats it gently.

POPPY

Poor little thing! She's quite overwrought, that's what's the matter. . . . Jenny, dear, send for some sal volatile, won't you? She turns back to Theo.

LADY JENNY

Is it necessary? . . . Ring the bell, Percy, please.

GRACE, to Theo.

I am so sorry for you. Can't we do anything? I might take your sister as my maid.

THEO, recovering herself.

Thank you, miss. I oughtn't to have said those things—thank you. I'm sorry. . . .

Enter footman.

## Scene VI

THE SAME. MADAME STÉFANIE, FOOTMAN.

LADY JENNY

Tell my maid to bring down some sal volatile.

FOOTMAN.

Yes, milady. Madame Stéfanie, my lady.

Madame Stéfanie hurries in with a parcel on her arm.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Oh, milady, a thousand apologies. She stops surprised. I thought the gown would be on you by now. Theo—did you not give my message? . . .

THEO

Yes, madame—but Lady Jenny thinks the gown not fit to wear. . . .

LADY JENNY, rather frightened.

Oh, not that, but when I asked why it was not ready this young woman made us a speech about the hardships of her life.

MADAME STÉFANIE, glaring at Theo.

Theo! . . . the impertinence!

To Lady Jenny, throwing up her hands.

Hardships! Milady, look at me—but she is dismissed from my workrooms for bad conduct, that's why she's rude. Now, Theo, pick up the dress, and we will put it on milady at once.

LADY JENNY

Do you really think you can manage it?

MADAME STÉFANIE

Of course . . . it will look beautiful. Come, milady.

LADY JENNY, to her guests.

Well, I suppose I had better try. Don't any of you be so angelic as to wait for me—it's an off chance if I get to the ball to-night. Pecksey, will you look after everyone?—and, Pecksey, you'll wait for poor little me, won't you?

PERCY

I'll come back for you, you silly old thing.

Lady Jenny goes out with Madame Stéfanie, followed by Theo carrying the box.

The footman enters, carrying a wine glass with some sal volatile in it on a salver and a note in his hand. He looks round, then puts the sal volatile down on a table—places the note on the salver, hands it to Percy, and waits.

## Scene VII

PERCY, POPPY, GERALD, GRACE, LORD LICKWOOD
FOOTMAN.

PERCY, feeling the envelope, to the footman.

No answer, thanks.

FOOTMAN

Mrs. Price's car is at the door. He goes out.

PERCY

Tearing open the envelope, to Poppy who stands close to him.

Just in time! . . . it's all right. Handing card to Poppy. Anything for me? No—nothing. Well, the duchess might have said thank you.

POPPY, pinching Percy's arm to express her delight.

Gerald, Gerald—we must go. I don't want to be late. It says ten on the card. Grace, you're going to wait for Jenny, I suppose? Come here, Licky. She moves aside. Take this chance now—be quick. Your mother won't miss you.

She turns away before he can answer and flutters out, followed by Percy and Gerald. Grace is standing by the open window on to the balcony. There is a moment's pause of embarrassment.

## Scene VIII

LORD LICKWOOD, GRACE.

LORD L.

They seem to have a pretty hot time in that shop. . . . I wish I could help that poor little girl. . . . Do you know she made me feel as if I wanted to knock somebody down . . . he laughs, only that isn't any use. But you understand, I know—you were so good and kind to her. . . .

GRACE, fiercely.

That's not being good and kind—it's all our fault that these awful cruelties happen.

LORD L.

Well, I'm not a Socialist and that sort of thing—but I'd like to make things better.

GRACE, turning suddenly to him.

Would you? . . . Would you, really?

LORD L., coming close.

Will you help me? A pause. You make me feel so different. I could be a decent fellow if only you'd marry me—don't turn away, Grace . . . you must know how I love you. . . . I worship you with all my soul.

GRACE, with a great effort.

Is it true . . . what I've heard? . . .

LORD L., bending his head.

I've been a brute . . . but it's all over. Can't you forgive me? You don't know what it would mean to me—the very thought of you makes me better—can't you forgive me? . . .

GRACE.

I didn't want my husband to ask me for forgiveness.

LORD L, holding out his hands.

Grace! Grace! You do love me. . . .

GRACE, very gravely.

I have always loved you. She puts her hand in his.

The door is opened, and Madame Stéfanie and Theo enter. Lord L. at once pulls Grace out into the garden, leaving the window open. Both Theo and Madame Stéfanie search about on the floor for something.

## SCENE IX

THEO, MADAME STÉFANIE.

THEO

It must be in the box, madame. She stoops to look.

MADAME STEFANIE, looking.

No it isn't. Where can it be, you fool? Really your carelessness is intolerable. Have you got no eyes? Ah, here it is, on the floor.

She picks up a piece of tulle and begins to move to the door.

THEO

Lady Jenny is just finished now, madame—let me go, please. I must get to Phœbe.

MADAME STÉFANIE

You girls are hopeless. You think of nothing but yourselves. Thank heaven, I'm quit of you. I can manage now without you. Get along, and don't let me ever see your face again.

THEO

If I'm not to see you again, give me our week's wages, Phœbe's and mine, all but one day—you haven't paid us.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Paid you! No, and I don't mean to pay you. Do you think I'm going to stand one of my own employées making a scene to a lot of ladies, as I 'ear you've done? What do you mean by it? I wonder you've the cheek to come and ask me for money. Why, I've lost more money through you this evening than weeks of your wages. She flounces out of the room.

THEO, wringing her hands.

What am I to do? Mr. Wilson—no . . . not him. I must have money—I must. Miss Ponsonby! She said she'd help me. She looks round the room, goes to entrance door, and calls softly, Miss Ponsonby. Perhaps she's outside. She goes to the garden window and looks out. Yes, that's her. Who is it she's walking with? Her expression alters. Oh—it's Lord Lickwood. She must be engaged to him! She re-enters the room, her eyes expressing interest and pleasure, then her face falls. She's forgotten all about me, of course—that's only natural, now she's happy. Oh! What am I to do?

Enter Percy from the entrance door.

## Scene X

THEO, PERCY.

PERCY

Hullo, Theo! Lady Jenny ready yet? I say, Theo, what made you behave like that? It was really very foolish.

THEO, interrupting.

Mr. Wilson—Phœbe's dangerously ill—I know she's broken a blood vessel . . . she may be dying. . . .

PERCY

Tut, tut. I'm very sorry. . . . Was she taken ill to-night?

THEO

Yes—after the inspector's visit—you know what's happened to me, Mr. Wilson. . . . I've lost my place—I haven't even got this week's wages—nor Phœbe's either. . . .

PERCY, slowly.

Theo! . . . no money . . . no wages. . . . After a pause. Perhaps the proposal I made to you this evening looks a little different now. . . .

THEO, wildly.

I must have money at once for Phœbe—it's a question of her life.

PERCY, taking out his pocket-book.

Now, Theo, you've only to ask for it, you know.

THEO

I thought perhaps—Mr. Wilson, sir—can't you help me? I'll work for you as long as you like—you know I'm clever at the dressmaking—I won't ask for any wages or any profits—you shall have it all for two years—three years—anything—I know you'd make money out of it—only help me now.

PERCY, coolly.

It's not a question of money, my dear girl—you don't suppose I'm such an ass as to put my money into the risks of dressmaking just for the fun of the thing? You know that I'm willing to take the risk if—if I can get you along with it. That's how the matter stands, to speak quite plainly.

THEO, wildly.

I must have some money now. . . . I must—give it me quick. . . .

PERCY, holding it out towards her.

You must get Phœbe well as quick as you can Theo . . . I'm not a rich man you know—and we must begin our partnership as soon as possible. He comes nearer, but Theo shrinks back. Oh, I'm not a beast. . . . I'll leave you alone, child, till your anxiety is over. Here's all I've got —£10 . . . and let me know the moment you need more. He takes a bank-note out of his pocket-book. Don't let her want for anything, poor little Phœbe . . . she'll soon pick up. He pats Theo on the shoulder, she stands quite dazed looking at the money. And cheer up — courage is half the battle. I'll send my own doctor—a very clever man—round to see her to-morrow—I've got your address.

THEO, moving towards the door.

I must go to her. . . .

PERCY

Won't you even say thank you?

THEO, with a sudden flash of anger.

Isn't this a bargain? What have I got to say "Thank you" for? You've got what you want—and I've got help for Phœbe. I think we're quits.

She turns to go, but the footman enters and speaks to her.

## Scene XI

THE SAME, FOOTMAN, MISS SPENCER, TOM BENT.

FOOTMAN

There are two persons coming up for the boxes. Moves nearer to Theo. They want to see you, miss, very particular—some bad news, I believe!

THEO

What do you mean?

Enter Tom Bent and Miss Spencer. Theo goes to them greatly startled. Miss Spencer comes forward and takes Theo's hand.

MISS SPENCER

My dear. A long pause. Tom and I got the doctor. . . . But we knew you were here. She pauses and looks at Tom. I've come to tell you—oh, Theo . . . be brave . . . we couldn't let you go home and find her.

THEO, in a hoarse whisper.

Phœbe . . . dead?

Miss Spencer nods her head silently with tears in her eyes.

THEO, quite calm, suddenly.

How was it? Tell me.

TOM

She didn't suffer, Theo.

THEO

Did she ask for me . . . did she?

MISS SPENCER

I was watching beside her . . . she seemed to be sleeping, when all at once she opened her eyes and stretched out her arms, and I raised her, and "Theo, Theo, come back," she said, "come back"—just as if she saw you—and then her eyes dropped, and she fell into my arms—dead—dead.

TOM

She didn't suffer, Theo.

THEO

She called me back . . . yes, she was right. . . . Phœbe was always right. What have I got to do now? She pauses. Mr. Wilson—here's your money. I don't want it any longer.

PERCY, really moved.

Oh, keep it, my dear Theo . . . keep it, I give it you freely. . . .

THEO, still quite calm.

No, thank you.

She drops the bank-note on the ground. Percy hesitates a moment, then he stoops and picks it up and puts it in his pocket-book, just as Lord Lickwood enters from the garden, holding the door open for Grace, who follows him.

## Scene XII

THE SAME, GRACE, LORD LICKWOOD, LADY JENNY, MAID, MADAME STÊFANIE, FOOTMAN.

GRACE, looks surprised.

What's the matter?

Percy goes up to Grace at once.

PERCY, in a low tone.

She's just heard that her sister is dead.

GRACE

Her sister! . . . Oh, poor girl. She moves to Theo, then hesitates and looks at Lickwood. Perhaps I'd better not speak to her.

LORD L.

I should think she'd rather be left alone.

GRACE

Oh, I must.

She goes to Theo and takes her hands. Theo turns away unable to speak about it.

THEO

Thank you, miss—please don't—I mustn't give way.

Enter Lady Jenny followed by her maid and Madame Stéfanie.

LADY JENNY

Well, Pecksey—it's a real triumph my dress—have you ever—— She stops. Hullo! What are all these people doing?

Madame Stéfanie comes forward.

MADAME STÉFANIE, very harshly.

Spencer—Bent—what do you mean by coming here?

MISS SPENCER

We came to fetch Theo, madame—her sister's dead.

MADAME STÉFANIE

Dead! Well, I never! Good Lord, what a mercy it didn't happen in the workroom—there'd have been an inquest. . . . I always said she wouldn't last. . . . She turns to Lady Jenny. I beg your pardon, milady, for my people in-

truding in this way, but they are all a little upset. *Lowering her voice.* One of my hands has died suddenly, and they've come to tell her sister.

LADY JENNY

Her sister—do you mean that girl? Oh, I see, she's still here. I'm sorry—but *in a lower tone* the poor wretch is probably much better off where she is.

MADAME STÉFANIE

You're quite right there, madame—she was a sickly creature. Come now, Miss Spencer—see to the boxes.

LADY JENNY

Grace. Grace, come along—we're dreadfully late as it is. Are you still here, Licky? Well, we can give you a lift.

GRACE, *to Miss Spencer.*

You'll let me know to-morrow, won't you, if there's anything I can do for her?

MISS SPENCER

Thank you, madame.

*Lady Jenny is at the door and Percy just behind her.*

LORD L., *to Grace in a low tone.*

My darling—we really must go now.

GRACE, *looking up at him radiantly.*

Yes. . . . Yes.

*They follow Lady Jenny and Percy, and all go out.*

MADAME STÉFANIE

Thank the Lord this job is over. . . . I'm worn out. Bent go and call a cab. . . .

Tom goes out.

Come here, Theo. I'm sorry this has happened, just as we've parted, but it's all for the best, really. That girl was only a drag on you. Let me give you a piece of advice—don't go against your employer in your next place, it doesn't pay. Theo simply stares at her without answering, and Madame Stéfanie turns to Miss Spencer. There's a lot of things in the bedroom want collecting—you can have a cab as it is so late—and take them round—here's a shilling. She gives the shilling.

MISS SPENCER

Thank you, madame. I'll see to it all.

Madame Stéfanie goes away without taking any further notice of Theo.

LADY JENNY'S MAID

Shall I help you, miss, with the box ?—there's a lot of things to put in it.

MISS SPENCER

Thank you. Theo, wait for me here a moment. Tom will take the boxes—and I shall come home with you.

Theo does not answer, and Miss Spencer goes out with the maid, each carrying an end of the box. For a moment Theo is alone. The footman enters with a lot of flowers on a tray. He looks round him, then comes stiffly up to Theo.